

THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF INDIA

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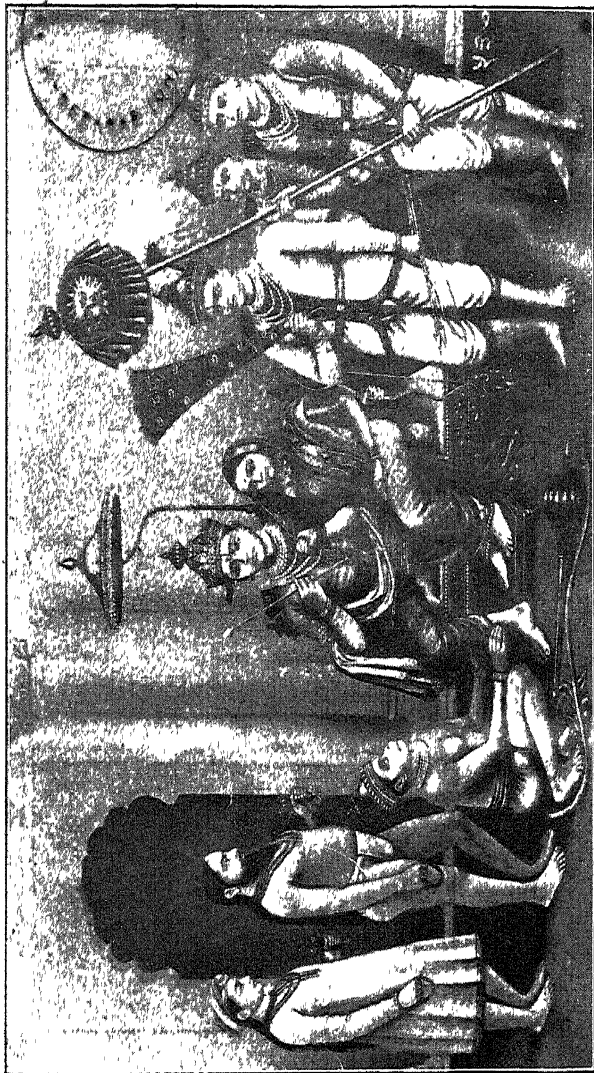
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EDITORIAL PREFACE

THE purpose of this series of small volumes on the leading forms which religious life has taken in India is to produce really reliable information for the use of all who are seeking the welfare of India. Editors and writers alike desire to work in the spirit of the best modern science, looking only for the truth. But, while doing so and seeking to bring to the interpretation of the systems under review such imagination and sympathy as characterize the best study in the domain of religion to-day, they believe they are able to shed on their work fresh light drawn from the close religious intercourse which they have each had with the people who live by the faith herein described; and their study of the relevant literature has in every instance been largely supplemented by persistent questioning of those likely to be able to give information. In each case the religion described is brought into relation with Christianity. It is believed that all readers in India at least will recognize the value of this practical method of bringing out the salient features of Indian religious life.



From a Nāstik photo-shop.

RĀMDĀS BEFORE RĀMA AND SĪTĀ

The figures (from left to right) are : Kalyān (one of the first disciples of Rāmdās), Rāmdās, Māruti (Hanumān), Rāma, Sītā, and three attendants.

THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF INDIA

RĀMDĀS AND THE RĀMDĀSĪS

BY

WILBUR S. DEMING, Ph.D.

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To
ELSIE S. DEMING

PREFACE

IN the preparation of this book I am under deep obligation to several kind friends who have given me invaluable assistance. Mr. Śaṅkar Śrī Kṛishṇa Dev, of Dhulia, has devoted a life-time to the study of Rāmdās and was instrumental in establishing the Sattkāryottejak Sabhā at Dhulia, for publishing his works. To all my queries Mr. Dev has given the greatest consideration, treating me with the utmost kindness throughout. Mr. Bālchandra Śaṅkar Devasthalī, of Ahmednagar, has been my faithful *pandit* for several years, examining various books with me, and is responsible for most of the translations herein given. The first ten chapters of the book were originally prepared as a thesis for the Ph.D. degree and submitted to the Faculty of the Kennedy School of Missions in the Hartford Seminary Foundation. In putting together the material, I have worked under the direction of Prof. LeRoy C. Barret, who has given generously of his time, both in reading the manuscript and in making many helpful suggestions. Dr. J. E. Abbott, another member of the Committee, has been always ready to give his judgment concerning difficult points. To the Editors of the 'Religious Life of India' series—Dr. J. N. Farquhar, Dr. Nicol Macnicol and the Rev. E. C. Dewick—I am also under heavy obligation. They have read the manuscript; suggested certain alterations; and have helped with the proof-reading. To all these kind friends, and to a number of others, both missionary and Indian, fellow-students of Marāṭhī literature, I express my grateful thanks.

The writer fully realizes the many imperfections of this volume, which simply serves as an introduction to a large and interesting subject. Rāmdās lived during a critical period of Marāṭhā history, playing an important part in that period, with the result that interest in his life is keen to-day throughout Western India, and Indians may well feel proud of his achievements. As a poet, teacher and practical sage, he stands high in the religious history of Mahārāshṭra. In preparing the volume, I have had occasion to consult quite a number of the standard works on Hinduism, a few of which have been mentioned, but I am particularly indebted to those books which deal especially with the Hinduism of Western India. The dates given in the book are according to the Christian calendar, the Hindu dates being always specified when given. By adding seventy-eight to the Hindu *śaka* date, we arrive at the Christian date. The phonetic spelling is according to the system of transliteration which has been used of late, with the exception of those words which have come to have a definite English spelling, such as personal names or geographical places. I have used anglicized words whenever possible. The Marāṭhī translations given in the book have been free, rather than literal, so that the meaning might be as clear as possible.

In closing, I wish to mention the many friendly contacts with Indian scholars and students which this study has brought, and which have been one of the most delightful phases of the work.

Satāra, India.
December, 1927,

WILBUR S. DEMING,

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<i>Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics</i> , edited by Dr. Hastings	<i>E.R.E.</i>
<i>History of the Marāṭhā People</i> , by Kincaid and Parasnis, Vol. I	<i>H.M.P.</i>
<i>Outline of the Religious Literature of India</i> , by Dr. J. N. Farquhar	<i>O.R.L.I.</i>
<i>Vaishnavism, Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems</i> , by Dr. Sir R. G. Bhandarkar. (Encyclopædia of Indo-Aryan Research)	<i>V.S.M.R.S.</i>
<i>Śivāji and his Times</i> , by Jadunath Sarkar ..	Sarkar
<i>The Life of Śivāji Mahārāj</i> , by N. S. Takakhav and K. A. Keluskar	Keluskar
<i>The Life and Teaching of Tukārām</i> , by J. N. Fraser and Rev. J. F. Edwards	Edwards
<i>Rise of the Marāṭhā Power</i> , by Justice M. G. Ranade	Ranade
<i>The Rites of the Twice-Born</i> , by Mrs. Sinclair Stevenson	Stevenson
<i>Indian Theism</i> , by Dr. Nicol Macnicol	Macnicol
<i>Hindu Ethics</i> , by Rev. John McKenzie	McKenzie
<i>Mahārāshṭra Sārasvat</i> , by V. L. Bhāve. (History of Marāṭhī Literature)	Bhāve
<i>Dāsopant Digambar</i> , by Dr. J. E. Abbott. (Journal of the American Oriental Society, Vol. XLII) ..	Abbott
<i>Vividh Viśaya</i> , Vols. I and II, published by Satkāryottejak Sabhā, Dhulia	<i>V.V.</i>
<i>Śrī Rāmdāsānchī Kavītā</i> , published by Satkāryottejak Sabhā, Dhulia	<i>Kavītā</i>
<i>Śrī Samarthaṇpratāp</i> , published by Sattkāryottejak Sabhā, Dhulia	<i>Pratāp</i>
<i>Śrī Sampradāyāchī Kāgadpatre</i> , published by Sattkāryottejak Sabhā, Dhulia	<i>Patre</i>
<i>Sajjāṅgad and Samartha Rāmdās</i> , by G. C. Bhāte ..	Bhāte
<i>Śrī Rāmdās Svāmiche Charitre</i> , by Hanumant Svāmī	Hanumant
<i>Santaviṇaya</i> , by Mahīpati. (Life of Rāmdās) ..	Mahīpati
<i>Śrī Samarthāchī Don Junī Charitre</i> , published at Dhulia	<i>Don Charitre</i>
<i>Śiva Chhatrapati</i> , by Surendranath Sen	Sen
<i>Sulabh Dāsbodh</i> , by S. K. Āltekar	Āltekar
<i>The Hindu Religious Year</i> , by M. M. Underhill ..	Underhill

CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND OF THE MOVEMENT

INTRODUCTORY SKETCH

No one can read Marāṭhī papers and magazines at the present time without frequently seeing the name *Rāmdās*. His volumes of poetry are for sale in the Marāṭhī book shops, and his picture is familiar to students of Marāṭhī history. Who was this man who has recently come to be the centre of much heated discussion? Where did he live and what did he do? The student of Marāṭhī poetry will answer that Rāmdās was a poet-saint, who resided in the Satāra district during the seventeenth century, A.D. This district is located in the Bombay Presidency and stretches north and south, just east of the Western Ghāt mountains. Satāra, a city of 20,000, is the capital of the district and is about 150 miles from Bombay, being about midway between Poona and Kolhapur. It was in the towns and villages of this district that Rāmdās spent most of his life. It was here that he wrote his poetry and also here that he organized a large number of *maths* (monasteries) in which the *advaita* philosophy (monism) was taught and the worship of the god Rāma was cultivated. The mere fact that about 9,000 copies of his *Dāsbodh* have been sold during the past twenty years is sufficient of itself to draw our attention to this remarkable man. The *Dāsbodh* is considered to be the greatest work of Rāmdās, being a gold-mine of information, instruction and inspiration. Its twenty chapters expound the Vedānta philosophy, and give much practical information concerning the cosmogony of the universe, together with sincere advice about various ethical matters; and, especially in later sections, constructive counsel as to political activities,

It is not, however, the poetical genius of Rāmdās which has called out so much controversy. It is because 'the Svāmī' (Rāmdās) was the spiritual preceptor of Śivājī, the founder of the Marāṭhā State, that his name is so frequently mentioned. The present interest of Mahārāshṭra (the area in which the Marāṭhī language is spoken) in political matters has naturally focussed the minds of the people upon those earlier days when the Marāṭhā kingdom was an independent state and a formidable factor in the affairs of India. It is not surprising, perhaps, that opinion is divided to-day concerning the stirring events of those earlier years and that caste-feeling has entered into the controversy. The Brahmans, who became the decisive influence in the religious movement established by Rāmdās, have a special reverence for the Svāmī and are inclined to emphasize his influence over Śivājī, in political as well as in spiritual matters. The non-Brahmans, on the other hand, resent any reflection upon the genius of their hero and assert that the Svāmī's influence was essentially negative in so far as political events were concerned. The controversy of *Rāmdās vs. Śivājī*, or *Brahmans vs. non-Brahmans* is very much in evidence at the time of writing, and will be rather fully discussed in the succeeding chapters.

Before entering into a detailed description of the Svāmī's environment, it may be well to give a brief outline of his life. Rāmdās was born in A.D. 1608, at Jāmb, a village in the Nizam's territory, near Jalna. Sūryājīpant and Rānūbāī, his father and mother, were very eager to have children—a wish that was ultimately realized in the births of two sons: Gaṅgādhār, born in 1605, and Nārāyaṇ (later called Rāmdās), born three years later. It was a happy, devout family into which these boys were born, but unfortunately the father died when Nārāyaṇ was only seven years of age. The latter was much averse to the thought of marriage, and it was only after much persuasion that his mother prevailed upon him to go through with the ceremony. When, during his marriage the word *Sāvadhān* was uttered, Nārāyaṇ (as recorded below, p. 28) suddenly rushed from the scene, and finally made his way to Pañchvaṭī, on the banks

of the Godāvarī river, near Nasik. For about twelve years he lived at Ṭakerlī, a village two miles distant; spending his time in worship and study. Then, taking the name Rāmdās (servant of Rāma), Nārāyaṇ set out on a pilgrimage to sacred places in other parts of India, the tradition asserting that he wandered thus, up and down the peninsula of India, for twelve years.

At the end of that time, he returned to Mahārāshṭra and made Chāphal his headquarters. The latter village is not far from Karād. Here he built a temple of the god Rāma, together with a maṭh, where those who desired to become disciples might live and study. As his influence extended, disciples flocked to his side and other maṭhs were established. In 1654 he retired, for a while, to the village of Śivthar, in order to write poetry. Many thrilling incidents are told of these busy years, and many miraculous events are ascribed to him. The fame of Rāmdās finally reached the ears of Śivājī, the Marāṭhā chieftain, and the latter became one of his disciples. In the later years of the Svāmī's life, Śivājī presented him with the hill fort at Paraḷī, near Satāra. This was renamed Sajjaṅgaḍ (good fort), and it was here that Rāmdās spent the last years of his life, secure in his friendship with Śivājī, and greatly beloved by all his disciples. He passed away in the year 1681, scarcely a year after the death of the great Marāṭhā leader.

THE LAND

When Rāmdās was born, the word Mahārāshṭra referred to the western part of the Deccan plateau in Western India, an area which to-day includes the whole, or portions of, the following districts: Nasik, Ahmednagar, Poona, Aurangabad, Sholapur, Kolhapur and Satāra. In other words, it was the stretch of territory just east of the mountain range called the Western Ghāṭs, and reaching inland. It is difficult to state just what the geographical limits were, estimates varying from 28,000 square miles to 100,000 square miles; but it included all the area where the Marāṭhī language was spoken, with the exception of the strip of sea-

coast called the Konkan,¹ which was a land of rich tropical vegetation, rice fields and fruits. While the people there spoke Marāṭhī, it did not come until later into the Marāṭhā national movement, largely because of the geographical and cultural differences between it and the Deccan. The latter is a plateau, 1,500 feet or more above sea-level, with little vegetation, a poor soil and an inadequate rainfall. The climate is hot during the hot weather but cool during the winter season, with cool refreshing nights most of the year, so that in many respects it is superior to the climate of many other sections of India where the humidity is excessive or the temperature more constant. Ranges of hills break the monotony of the landscape and occasional oases of green fields, watered by wells, relieve the eye, which everywhere meets an expanse of withered brown fields or parched earth, most of the year round. Periodic famines keep the people poor, but with the increase of irrigation and industrial facilities, these no longer bring the disaster that they brought in the time of Rāmdās. At that time there were more forests than there are to-day, and probably less cultivation of the fields. The chief crops were of grain—*jowārī*, *bājri* and maize. The most notable physical features of the Deccan were its natural defences, the approach to the Ghāṭs from the sea often being a solid wall of rock precipice, while the mountains on the Deccan side were generally rugged and easily defended. As a result, this area lent itself to the building of a series of hill forts, to which the Marāṭhā warriors could retire when necessary, and which became, with very little additional fortification, almost impregnable; a fact which had much to do with the growth and establishment of the Marāṭhā kingdom. The Deccan was protected on the north by the peaks and forests of the Vindhya and Satpurā mountain ranges.

THE PEOPLE

The inhabitants of this area were generally called Marāṭhās, although that word has been somewhat loosely

¹ *H.M.P.*, Vol. I, p. 1; Sarkar, p. 2.

used and has occasionally referred to the Marāṭhā *caste* as distinguished from the Kunbī or other castes.¹ The people themselves were the product of the land. Because of the rugged nature of the country, the number of forests and the difficulties of travel, there were few large prosperous cities inhabited by wealthy, pleasure-loving people. The inhabitants were too segregated, and too busy struggling against the adverse forces of nature, to allow for any such development. They lived in small villages and all had to work hard to maintain themselves, from the village headmen down to the servants and the sweepers. The only wealthy class was composed of the bankers, who conducted most of the trade, financed the crops, and frequently owned a large part of the land.

As a result of this struggle for existence, certain qualities were developed in the Marāṭhā people which later stood them in good stead. They became self-reliant, courageous, fearless, and democratic, both in their attitude toward women and toward each other. A Chinese traveller of the seventh century A.D. speaks of them as proud-spirited, warlike, kindly toward the helpless but merciless in revenge.² Living so close to the soil and leading such active lives, they necessarily developed hardihood and a certain shrewdness which, when not supported by moral scruples, often became a capacity for trickery. The women had an equal share in the field-work with the men, and they came to occupy an important place in the Marāṭhā social group. Even the outcaste and village servants responded to the democratic tone of the community by developing self-respect, and the class of professional beggars was not much in evidence. While the physical features of Mahārāshṭra developed the qualities referred to above, they also produced some unfortunate results. Because of the hard conditions in which the people found themselves, they had little opportunity for culture or refinement, and therefore they knew almost nothing of æsthetic development and luxuries. The Muhammadan leisured classes regarded them as crude, ill-mannered and lacking in the social

¹ Sarkar, p. 15.

² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

graces. Their best buildings were insignificant as compared with the marvellous gems of Muhammadan architecture; and it is said that the Marāṭhās during all their ascendancy gave no cultural gift to India in the form of a building or a picture. This was the price they had to pay because of their absorption in the more elementary and rigorous pursuits of life. Mr. Sarkar also points out that the Marāṭhās were decidedly weak in their business capacity, and produced no great captain of industry.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

In all probability the word Marāṭhā comes originally from the word Rāstika, which was the name of a people living in the Daṇḍaka Forest (Deccan). References to these people are found in various inscriptions carved on rocks in North India which tell of the missionaries sent out by Aśoka. These people began to call themselves Mahārāstikas or Mahārāshṭrikas (great Rāshṭrikas) in token of their independence, or for a similar reason; and the territory eventually became known, therefore, as Mahārāshṭra, inhabited by Marāṭhās.¹ This is only one theory among several, and the whole problem is still under discussion. Marāṭhī has been classified as an Aryan language; but it undoubtedly contains many non-Aryan elements, and Mr. V. L. Bhāve holds that it is probably an admixture of the language of the Aryan invaders with that spoken by the aboriginal inhabitants of Mahārāshṭra.² According to Professor Patwardhan, in his *Wilson Philological Lectures*, there was a language called Mahārāshṭrī at the time of Vararuchī, who wrote about 380 B.C. From that time till the tenth century A.D. there is a gap in our knowledge of the language, because practically no literary documents have come down to us.³ It is generally assumed, however, that modern Marāṭhī is a development of the earlier Mahārāshṭrī, a fact made clear by a comparison of the various forms in the two languages.

¹ *H.M.P.*, p. 5.

² Bhāve, p. 8.

³ W. B. Patwardhan, *Ferguson College Magazine*, Vol. VIII, No. 3, pp. 104-10.

Until the eighteenth century, Marāṭhī literature was chiefly composed of religious poetry in various metres, and had very little prose worth mentioning, the earlier prose being found in letters and documents which contained many Persian words. Since many of the people could neither read nor write, the absence of dignified prose literature was perhaps not important, inasmuch as the people had a spoken literature of their own. Heroic ballads were sung by travelling minstrels, who gathered large crowds about them to listen to the hero-stories of bygone days; and even religious poetry was memorized, until the peasants could repeat the *abhaṅgs* of their favourite poets by heart. In making Marāṭhī the medium for giving their religious instruction, instead of the time-honoured Sanskrit, the Marāṭhā saints and *bhaktas* were a great help in popularizing that language and lifting it to its present position of influence and dignity.

SOCIAL LIFE

The social life of the people was built around the village, where there was a clearly defined system of organization, each member of the community contributing his or her share to the well-being of the group. The joint-family system prevailed and the family bond was a strong one, the sons bringing their brides home to live under the paternal roof; and every member of the family was surrounded by social and religious obligations which followed him (or her) from birth to death. The women performed practically all the manual work in connection with the household and shared in the discipline and training of the children. Although most of the people lived in the villages, there were a few cities in Mahārāshṭra; but it was in them that Moslem influence was predominant, and therefore there was very little in common between the inhabitants of these larger centres and the village folk. While there were many representatives from the three higher castes among the Hindus of Mahārāshṭra (namely, the Brahmans or priestly class, the Kshatriyas or warrior class, and the Vaiśyas or trading class), the chief group among the Marāṭhās

was the agricultural class, which formed the backbone of Śivāji's army and which contained the two sub-castes of Kunbīs and Marāṭhās. With their background and training, these men made splendid soldiers, and the name 'Marāṭhā' became famous in Indian history. Although the outcastes in each community had no privileges to speak of, they seem to have been well treated, and proved to be helpful in the national movement.

POLITICAL LIFE

From the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, the political history of the Deccan was a struggle for mastery between the resident Muhammadan kingdoms and the Mogul emperors from the north. Ahmednagar and Bijapur fought for supremacy, and each in turn was called upon to repel the northern invader. For a period of three hundred years the Deccan Hindus were ruled by Moslems; and during the lifetime of Rāmdās the Mogul power was centred at Ahmednagar, which had been captured by Aurangzeb. As a result of this foreign yoke, the Hindus had become demoralized and, to a certain extent, denationalized. Their idols were hated by the Moslems, who, when occasion arose, often despoiled their shrines. In the course of the frequent fighting, fields were laid waste, booty captured, and the whole countryside ravaged; while bribery and political corruption were practised on every hand. In short, the story of the Moslem supremacy in the Deccan makes unpleasant reading; and, although the period of the Marāṭhā Kingdom and Confederacy was turbulent, it had many redeeming features, which resulted in its being considered the 'heroic age' of the Marāṭhās.

In spite of the fact that the Moslems were in control of the Deccan for about three centuries, they never entirely subdued the country or changed the habits of the people. After being in power in North India for two centuries, they had invaded the Deccan about the beginning of the fourteenth century, and it took them thirty years or more to subdue the Hindus upon the plains. In the hilly sections their influence was slight, being easily thrown off by

Śivājī. Mr. Ranade, in his *Rise of the Marāṭhā Power*, gives the steps by which Hindu influences reasserted themselves.¹ Inasmuch as the Muhammadans were unable to control adequately the inaccessible parts of the country, the villages were largely left to themselves, and the resulting quarrels or feuds were many and bitter. In his book, *The Administrative System of the Marāṭhās*, Dr. Surendranath Sen gives several instances of these desperate family quarrels. The genius of Śivājī early showed itself when he broke the power of these local village tyrants, and they became loyal adherents of his cause. On the whole, the political background for the life-work of Rāmdās was stormy, and witnessed the emergence of a Hindu national movement, under the brilliant leadership of Śivājī.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

The most notable feature of religious conditions in the village was the domestic worship in each home, where a small shrine was set apart, and every day the head of the family performed the religious ceremonies. In her book, *The Rites of the Twice-Born*, Mrs. Sinclair Stevenson gives the details of this worship in the higher-caste homes. As a rule, each family worshipped a particular god, the image of which was put in the place of honour, among the other gods. At the hour of worship, scented oil is poured over the images, which are then bathed in a saucer, dried and besmeared with a sandalwood preparation; flowers are offered to them, lights are waved around them, and a small bell is rung; after which food is presented to them and the family sit down to their own meal. During this worship of about half an hour, prayers are uttered by the male head of the household, except during special ceremonies, when the services of the family priest may be required.² Once a year the members of the family offer prayers to the spirits of the departed ancestors (*Śrāddha*); and at various times, during the day or the evening, pious Hindus visit the small village temples, salute the god and depart, perhaps

¹ Ranade, pp. 27-34.

² Edwards, p. 8.

giving a small offering to the Brahman attendant. In practically every Deccan village there is an image of Māruti, the monkey god, Rāma's attendant, and also a temple of Śiva, which is visited by devotees morning and evening. Mr. Justice Ranade states that, during the days of the Peshwās, about two hundred and fifty Deccan temples were receiving State help, namely, fifty-two temples of Māruti, eighteen temples of Rāma, nine of Viṣṇu, thirty-four of Viṭhobā, twelve of Bālajī (Kṛishṇa), forty of Mahādev, thirty-six of Gaṇapati, and thirty-two of the aboriginal gods.

In contrast to the more formal Hindu worship, there were many meetings in which the priest had no share; these were the musical services, called *bhajan*, *kathā* or *kīrtan*.¹ A *bhajan* is a choral service in which all those who are present have a share. A *kīrtan* is a service in which a leading singer expounds a theme and invites a group of attendants or the audience to join in a refrain; a *kathā* seeks to arouse patriotic or religious fervour by the musical narration of the exploits of heroes and gods. The chief singer, or *kīrtankār*, may do this work as a voluntary religious duty or as a recreation, if he is a layman, or it may be his sole occupation. Such a man travels from village to village, and through his songs he teaches devotion to a Hindu god, generally incarnations of Viṣṇu, like Kṛishṇa or Rāma, although there are some singers who belong to various sects of the god Śiva. A less attractive side of the religious life in the village was the prevalence of superstitious practices, and this is still true. Outside many Deccan villages there is a ring of white stones, representing Vetāl, the prince of demons.² During epidemics an image of the cholera or plague spirit is often set up outside the village, in the hope that it will not enter but will pass by. Belief in omens was common to all classes; and sorcerers, in the form of wandering ascetics, went about frightening people and spreading the doctrine of evil spirits. During times of famine large sums of money were spent in employing Brahmans to pour water on the gods for long periods

¹ Edwards, p. 10.

² *H.M.P.*, Vol. I, p. 11.

at a time ; and in many other ways penances were resorted to in order to appease the angry spirits.¹

What was the place of the Brahmans in the religious scheme of things ? Contemporary records seem to show that their spiritual influence had waned before the time of Śivājī. This may be explained by the fact that the Brahmans of Western India took an active part in the administrative work of the country, and therefore probably neglected the spiritual duties which were their normal inheritance. This situation was unique and unparalleled elsewhere, since they not only acted as officers in the Marāṭhā army, but also filled many of the posts in the Government service ; and they seem to have given satisfaction in these tasks, but they became very superior and looked down upon Brahmans from other parts of the country. In one part of the *Dāsbodh* Rāmdās refers to the Brahmans thus : 'The Brahmans, distracted in mind and lacking in virtue, have lost their respectability and have become disciples of other disciples.'² In another place he says : 'Friends, you have been reduced to such a condition that you needs must wander about from day to day begging for food, which does not prove sufficient. What is the reason for this, and why are you blaming each other ? What is gone is gone ; from now on you should seek wisdom.'³ Rāmdās evidently was not sympathetic with their situation, and felt that the Brahmans should have retained their religious leadership instead of becoming worldly. In the general religious confusion, and because of the Moslem depredations, it is possible that many Brahmans became discouraged and gave up trying to assert their religious leadership. The Svāmī (Rāmdās) describes that era thus : 'Several idols have been forcibly broken,'⁴ and 'many images have been polluted, some being thrown into the water and some trodden underfoot. All the sacred places have been polluted by the wicked.'⁵ 'Everywhere differences of opinion are evident and every-

¹ *Miscellaneous Writings*, by Mr. Justice M. G. Ranade, p. 374.

² *Dāsbodh*, ch. xiv, sec. 7, v. 31. ⁴ *Ibid.*, ch. vi, sec. 3, v. 34.

³ *Ibid.*, ch. xiv, sec. 8, v. 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, ch. vi, sec. 6, v. 35.

one is acting as he likes, without thinking of the welfare of others.'¹ If we are to judge from the picture given by Rāmdās, we must conclude that while some Brahmans had climbed to a prosperous estate in the secular world, others were living in poverty and were more or less unpopular; which was due, according to the Svāmī, to their own past failings.

There is, however, a brighter side to the picture, and this is connected with the development of the *Bhakti* movement. In his book on *Indian Theism*, Dr. Macnicol has shown that there were theistic tendencies as far back as the *Rig Veda*, in spite of Vedic polytheism. 'Henotheism' was the tendency to concentrate their worship upon one God at a time, as Max Müller has pointed out. But in the philosophical reaction against Brahmanic sacerdotalism, the theistic note was gradually submerged by pantheism, which lifted religion to a reflective and intellectual sphere. Notwithstanding the popularity of the *Upanishads*, however, the spiritual hunger of the common people remained unsatisfied, and a more emotional expression of religion continued to manifest itself among them, chiefly in the form of poetry and legend. Even at this early date the name of Viṣṇu had become associated with theistic devotion, as opposed to pantheistic tendencies. Dr. Macnicol refers to an ancient legend found in the *Brāhmaṇas* which tells how, in the performance of a *sattra* or great sacrifice, Viṣṇu obtains pre-eminence among all the gods. Dr. R. G. Bhandarkar emphasizes the important place that Viṣṇu occupied in the ritual of domestic life, such as the marriage ceremonial, and says that possibly the legend of his 'three mighty steps' furnished the mysterious background which made it possible for him to be elevated to the supreme place he later came to occupy. From the earliest Vedic times Varuṇa also was connected with the deliverance of mankind from distress; and Varuṇa's power in this respect was eventually transferred to Viṣṇu, who had evidently manifested his willingness to help men in their extremity.

Dr. Farquhar says that there were three distinct stages

¹ *Dāśbodh*, ch. xi, sec. 2, v. 25.

in the theistic movement which had Viṣṇu for its centre. The first stage was represented by the original heroic poems called the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which narrated the historical legends without any attempt at transformation or enlargement. In this stage, for example, there was no attempt to gloss over the faults of the heroes. The second stage was represented by new additions to the great epics, in which the fame of the heroes was enhanced and the three gods, Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, were raised to the chief place and considered to be equal. The two heroes, Kṛishṇa and Rāma, were now represented as partial incarnations of Viṣṇu, and it is therefore clear that at this time there was an organized sect which exalted Viṣṇu to a place of special honour and claimed for itself the heroes of both the popular poems. Thirdly, the *Bhagavadgītā* carries the process a step further when it identifies Viṣṇu not merely with Kṛishṇa, the hero of the epic, but also with the great Brahman-Ātman of the *Upanishads*; and therefore he becomes the Absolute, the One without a second, the Source of all things and all beings. Whereas the *Upanishads* had taught that release was possible only to the three higher castes, the *Gītā* now taught that release was possible to all men and women of the four Hindu castes, laymen as well as professional ascetics. Vaiṣṇavas had also come to revere the *Bhāgavat-Śāstra*, which is a group of works extolling Viṣṇu as Bhagavān (blessed); and those who particularly stressed this doctrine were called Bhāgavatas, the Marāṭhā Vaiṣṇavas generally belonging to this group. The doctrine of *avatāras*—which means a descent; i.e., the appearance of a god on earth, and adding the idea that these appearances were for the sake of helping men—was further developed, until Viṣṇu's incarnations were fixed at ten, although an extreme estimate mentions as many as twenty-eight.

In many respects, Vaiṣṇavism, whether connected with the worship of Rāma or of Kṛishṇa, was a reform movement, and attempted to soften or counteract the extreme rigidity of Vedāntic pantheism. It taught the reality of both God and man (dvaita) as opposed to monism

(advaita), which was so successfully expounded by the great Śaṅkara and upheld by the Vedānta school of philosophy. It generally used the vernaculars, rather than Sanskrit, for giving religious instruction. As a matter of fact, Vaiṣṇavism stopped short of breaking with either caste or Brahmanism, and, with their usual capacity for adjustment, the Brahmans quietly took possession of Vaiṣṇavite shrines and saw to it that peace was preserved. Although the *Gītā* taught three different ways of achieving release, the doctrine therein which is most emphasized to-day is that of *bhakti* or devotion, salvation being attained by loving devotion to a personal god; and this doctrine has always been one of the outstanding characteristics of Vaiṣṇavism. It was chiefly taught by wandering singers or religious teachers, who travelled over India and sang to the people in the vernaculars. This resulted in the development of a number of sects in various parts of the land, particularly during the years A.D. 900 to 1350, and the bhakti doctrine developed along a number of different lines. After the sixteenth century, the sects began to diminish in number and in influence, many of the worshippers drifting back into polytheism.¹

About A.D. 1400 a worshipper of Rāma, named Rāmānanda, became famous in North India. He may have belonged to a sect which produced the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* (spiritual Rāmāyaṇa). He taught that all the servants of God are brothers, and that faith in God, not caste or position, is the thing that matters. Tulsī Dās (1532–1623) popularized the worship of Rāma in the north by his translation of the *Rāmāyaṇa*² into Hindī (although it is not strictly a translation), and he helped to identify Rāma worship with a noble morality. The Kṛiṣṇa cult was preached by Vallabha and Chaitanya (1486–1534), the latter becoming the founder of a great movement in Bengal, where he was shocked by the evil practices, sacrifices and superstitions of Kālī worship.³ The Chaitanya movement unfortunately was emotional almost to the point

¹ *O.R.L.I.*, pp. 220, 292. ² *O.R.L.I.*, p. 323. ³ Edwards, p. 37.

of hysteria, and it was concerned all too much with the love affairs of the pastoral Kṛishṇa, resulting in an unwholesome moral atmosphere. The sect of the Vallabhas descended to unrestrained sensuality.¹

The bhakti of the Marāṭhā area was, on the other hand, much more wholesome and restrained, but none the less genuine. Dnyāneśvar may be called the father of this movement. He is famous for his commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā*, called the *Dnyāneśvarī*. He lived at the end of the thirteenth century, and while he taught pantheism (advaita doctrines) and stressed *yoga* ideas, he also showed that he was influenced by the Bhāgavatas and wrote like an enthusiastic bhakta.² The next important Marāṭhā bhakta was Nāmdev, who probably lived at the end of the fourteenth century.³ He is famous because of his denunciation of idolatry, although he continued to use idols; and it is said that every member of his family could compose poetry. He was a tailor by birth and occupation, but spent most of his life in propagating bhakti, not only in Mahārāshṭra but also in the Punjab, where there is a shrine dedicated to his memory.⁴ Like the other Marāṭhā bhaktas, he was a devotee of Viṭhal, the Paṇḍharpūr god.

Eknāth (died 1608) was a Brahman of Paithan who at times broke caste rules and suffered persecution for his zeal. On a number of occasions he befriended outcastes (Mahārs) and was a man of very saintly character. His philosophy was monistic, resembling that of Dnyāneśvar or of Mukundarāj. Tukārām (1608–49) was a contemporary of Rāmdās and was a shopkeeper before he heard the call of Viṭhobā and gave himself to the life of a poet. His poetry, which is of a deeply devotional nature, reflecting his own religious moods, has gripped the hearts of the simple Deccan villagers. His great theme was loving devotion for Viṭhobā of Paṇḍharpūr, and he has given to us deeply stirring abhangs telling of his longing for God, his sense of need, his humility and his trust. He did not delve much into Hindu philosophy,

¹ *E.R.E.*, Vol. IX, p. 116.

² *V.S.M.R.S.*, p. 92.

³ *O.R.L.I.*, p. 235.

⁴ *O.R.L.I.*, p. 299.

but there are a few strands of monistic thought in his poetry, although most of the time he was a consistent bhakta. He helped to popularize the Paṇḍharpūr worship; and as the pilgrims march to that sacred shrine, they still chant the names of two of their most revered teachers: 'Dnyānobā, Tukobā; Dnyānobā, Tukobā!'¹

THE POETS AND THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Until the publication of *The Rise of the Marāṭhā Power*, by Mr. Justice M. G. Ranade, it was not clear just what share the Marāṭhā poets had in the upbuilding of the Marāṭhā nation. Rāmdās has always been regarded as the one poet who had political interests and who contributed materially to the development of the national spirit; but the other poets were regarded as teachers of religion only, and it was not thought that they had exerted any particular influence in the national movement. Mr. Justice Ranade has demonstrated, to the satisfaction of many students, that the bhakti poets of Mahārāshṭra had a considerable share in the work of preparing the way for Sivājī. In his book, *The Marāṭhās and the English*, Mr. N. C. Kelkar, the Editor of the *Kesari*, one of the few scholars who has not accepted this conclusion, asserts that the teaching of the bhakti poets was negative, dealing only with renunciation. But Principal Bhāte, of Willingdon College, Mr. C. A. Kincaid, Rev. J. F. Edwards, Prof. J. Sarkar and others have accepted the conclusions set forth by Mr. Justice Ranade.

In the narrow sense it is probable that the bhakti poets taught many religious themes that had little to do with the political regeneration of the country; themes which seemed to oppose such a regeneration, like that of renunciation and turning away from the things of this world. Indirectly, however, the bhakti poets stirred the Hindus with their poetic songs and began a religious and social upheaval which had far-reaching consequences. In the first place, these poets helped to purify the Hinduism

¹ Edwards, p. 38.

of that day and stressed bhakti as the chief means of salvation. Secondly, it was against the rigid maintenance of caste ; including, as it did, people from all classes, some of the leaders being Brahmans, tailors, carpenters, potters, shopkeepers, barbers and Mahārs. It was a Hindu movement in a country dominated by Muhammadans, who had destroyed many Hindu shrines and brought about a condition of religious indifference, resulting finally in a feeling of hopelessness. It was essentially a non-Brahman movement in an area where the Brahmans had control of the temple-worship, in addition to the many secular tasks which they had taken up. It was a popular movement as opposed to the groups of privilege, and in some particulars has been compared with the Protestant Reformation of Western Europe.¹ Forgetting rigid caste distinctions, united in a passionate loyalty to God, whether Viṭhobā or Rāma, and increasingly conscious of their Hindu nationality as opposed to the Moslem invaders, the common people of Mahārāshṭra gradually acquired a group-consciousness and a racial pride which made them a ready instrument for Śivājī's plans. The seed had been sown ; and under his able leadership the shackles of Muhammadan control were broken. It was in such a background and under such stirring conditions that Rāmdās lived and preached, not merely as an onlooker, but as one who had a definite share in the work of those busy years, finally becoming the spiritual guide of the great political leader.

¹ *Tukārām, the Poet and Saint*, by Mr. G. R. Navalkar.

CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHY OF RĀMDĀS

INTRODUCTION

It is not possible to write a strictly historical life of Rāmdās, because the absence of references to him in the historical writings of his period makes it difficult for us to judge accurately about many details of his life. If by history we mean facts supported by neutral observers or eye-witnesses, then, in the case of Rāmdās, we are often left in the dark, and indeed Dr. J. E. Abbott is right in saying that we must treat the narratives of many of India's poet-saints as traditional rather than as historical.¹ For example, among the numerous *bakhars* (biographies in verse) of this great Svāmī, there is none that carefully follows a chronology or arranges the events of his life in orderly sequence ; and while it is barely possible that further documents will be found to throw more light upon this point, this is rather doubtful. On the other hand, we are fortunate in having a wealth of material upon which to draw and are therefore able to give a more complete picture of Rāmdās than can be given of many other poet-saints of Western India. There are a number of devoted scholars who have made Rāmdās their life study, the most notable being Mr. Śaṅkar Śrī Kṛishṇa Dev, of Dhulia. He was instrumental in establishing an historical society to produce literature and carry on research in the subject of Rāmdās and his movement. Established in 1893, and supported by subscribers and members, it has published a great many manuscripts, and it also is publishing a bi-monthly maga-

¹ Abbott, p. 255.

zine, called *Rāmdās and Rāmdāsī*. In the office of Mr. Dev there are hundreds of manuscripts which have not yet been published, but which are being slowly catalogued and which will, no doubt, be given to the world as time goes on.

HISTORICAL DATES

There are a few dates in the life of Rāmdās which are verified by original letters or documents, and which, therefore, can be considered authentic. For example, there is a letter of Divākar Gosāvī, addressed to Bahirām Bhaṭ, stating that from A.D. 1654 Rāmdās planned to live in Śivthar for ten years in order to write poetry.¹ There is a letter, dated February 13, 1659, from Bhāskar Gosāvī to Divākar Gosāvī relating an interview with Śivājī. In answering a question of the latter regarding Rāmdās, Bhāskar informed him that his master lived at Chāphaḷ (near Satāra) where he had founded a hermitage and established a temple of the god Rāma. Chāphaḷ evidently was his official residence, even though he had withdrawn to Śivthar for literary activities. A letter of Keshav Gosāvī to Divākar Gosāvī, dated April 4, 1672, says that Śivājī was about to visit 'Samartha' (Rāmdās) at Śiṅgaṇvādī. Portions of some of these letters have been translated by Mr. Takakhav in the *Life of Śivājī Mahārāj*, page 536 and following. A letter from Śivājī to Dattājīpant, dated 1672, says that Rāmdās is living at Chāphaḷ. Another letter, written by Rāmdās himself to Raghunāth Bhaṭ, shows that he was living at Helvāk in 1674. A letter, dated 1674, from Viṭhal Gosāvī to Divākar, refers to the above letter as being actually written by Rāmdās, thus verifying the evidence in the letter itself, and stating that Rāmdās lived at Helvāk for four months and then went to Chāphaḷ. In a letter to Jijoī Kātkar, dated 1676, Śivājī says that Rāmdās of Śivthar is about to visit the Sajjaṅgaḍ fort. There are many letters extant giving information about money grants given by Śivājī to the religious activities of Rāmdās and his followers. One such letter, dated September

¹ Keluskar, p. 542.

3, 1677, written by Dattājī Trimaḷ, gives a list of *inam* lands (grants) conferred upon the Saint for the benefit of the temple and the worship, and there are other letters telling of land grants. Thus, by means of these original records, we are able to follow the movements of the Svāmī to a limited extent, to know the places he visited, and to catch a glimpse of him, first here, then there.

SOURCES FOR THE LIFE OF RĀMDĀS

Early Sources

1. For the sake of convenience, we will roughly grade the sources for his life into two groups, the early and the later. Biographies of the Svāmī are still being written, and one must discriminate carefully between those which are primary sources and those which are secondary or merely copies of earlier writings. First, there are numerous references in his poetry which have biographical value, such as his references to the Muhammadans, the Brahmans, or to the political conditions of the country. In one of his poems, which was found in the Tākerlī maṭh (monastery), near Nasik, he tells of the evil conditions prevalent in the land and of his desire to improve them. He frequently refers to geographical places in his poetry, and there is also a great deal of subjective matter, showing his moods, his yearnings and his hopes. In his preface to the published volume of the *Dāsboḍh*, Mr. S. S. Dev has carefully analysed the teachings of the Svāmī and has drawn certain biographical conclusions from them.¹

2. Second, among the early sources, we would mention the letters which have come down to us, many of which have been published at Dhulia, one volume containing 420 letters and documents (*Śrīsampradāyācī Kāgadpatre*). The first fifty letters are very important, many of them being from one disciple to another, or letters that passed between disciples and government officials. The first letter in the volume was written by Rāmdās to Śivājī.

¹ Preface to the *Dāsboḍh*, published at Dhulia, edited by Mr. Dev.

These letters give valuable information about the close relationship existing between Śivāji's government and the Rāmdāsī movement, and contain illuminating references both to individuals and to events, thus affording an intimate picture of the Svāmī's life.

3. Mr. Viśvanāth Kāśināth Rājwāde has given his life to the acquisition and study of old Marāṭhī manuscripts. Some years ago, among the papers of Pratāp Siṅg Mahārāj, he found two or three papers regarding Rāmdās, one of which was a poem in *ovī* metre by his disciple, Bhīmasvāmī Śahāpurkar, telling of the Svāmī's death. The records claim that Bhīmasvāmī arrived from the Tanjore maṭh three days after Rāmdās died; and if, therefore, this account is genuine, as seems likely, it is of great importance. Mr. Rājwāde has a photographic copy of the manuscript.¹

4. At Chāphaḷ, among the papers of Bāpurao Upādyc, Mr. Rājwāde discovered a diary, which contains notes about the Svāmī's life and says that he died on the ninth of the dark half of Māgha, śaka 1603 (A.D. 1681), four days after which these notes were written. The diary says that Antājī Gopāl was instructed by Divākar to write a brief account of Rāmdās, four days after his death, and that this was done with the approval of the other disciples, adding that the rough notes of Antājī were copied four days later by Gopāl Āmbāji.² This document passed from the Śahāpurkars into the possession of the Upādhyes of Chāphaḷ and is now in the possession of Mr. Rājwāde. It is written in *Bālbodh* (large Marāṭhī script) upon both sides of two sheets of paper. Some critics make light of it, on the ground that it contains legendary material; and they question its genuineness.

5. A brief biography of the Svāmī, called *Bhaktamañ-jalī*, was written by Bhīmasvāmī of Śahāpurkar, and this is the only account which we possess written by an immediate disciple. Only half of the original bakhar is available to-day. Śahāpur, the home of Bhīmāji, is a village two miles from Masur. According to the Svāmī's instructions,

¹ *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 20.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. I, sec. 21.

Bhīmāji went to Tanjore in 1675 and there established a math. The importance of this biography may be understood when we realize that most of the others were written a hundred years or more after the Svāmī's death. In the introduction to *Don Charitre* (published at Dhulia), Mr. S. S. Dev enumerates twenty-five points which are mentioned in this poetical biography, but which are not found in the prose biography written by Hanumant Svāmī; and Mr. Dev further says that, since this biography differs from that of Hanumant in regard to thirty or forty details, this must be a more reliable source.

6. Dīnkar Svāmī was one of the original disciples, who had a math at Tisgāon, near Ahmednagar; and in Karegāon, in the Ahmednagar district, a manuscript copy of his poetry was found some years ago. This poetry contains general religious teaching and in the published volume, *Svānubhav Dīnkar*, chapter xvi, section 4, there is an account of the appearance of Rāma before Rāmdās, and of his own (Dīnkar's) initiation.

7. Another important document in this early group is the *Samarthapratāp*, a biography of Rāmdās, written by Giridhar, who died in 1728. He was a disciple of Bahyābāi, who was a disciple of Venābāi, one of the Svāmī's disciples; and he is said to have seen Rāmdās when he was young. He probably wrote the biography about fifty years after the Svāmī's death. In his preface to the published edition of this work, Mr. Dev calls attention to the tradition that Giridhar spent seven years in the company of Rāmdās.¹ Mr. Dev values the work highly, and Mr. V. L. Bhāve quotes it freely in his life of the Svāmī, particularly those portions which describe the appearance and the habits of the poet.² As has already been stated, there are very few references to Rāmdās in contemporary historical works, and the few that exist are not important in the historical sense.

¹ *Pratāp*, Introduction, p. 14.

² Bhāve, ch. on Rāmdās, pp. 213-14

Later Sources

1. Coming now to the later sources, there is, first of all, a poetical biography by Bhīmasvāmī Śīrgāvkar, who came from Śīrgāon, a village four miles from Chāphaḷ. Rāmdās often visited that village, and it was there that Kalyān once lived with his mother and his brother, Dattātraya. Among a number of manuscripts which Mr. Dev found in the maṭh there was this life by Bhīmasvāmī (*Bhaktalīlāmṛit*), written about 1797, and it has since been published. The family succession was as follows: Dattātraya, Raghusvāmī, Yeśvant and Bhīmasvāmī. At first it was Bhīmasvāmī's intention to write only about Rāmdās, but later he extended the scope of the work to include the historical accounts of thirty-six other saints and heroes, including Kṛishṇa. Making practically no references to earlier sources, Bhīmasvāmī relied largely upon oral traditions in composing this work and included within it a good deal of legendary material.

2. Hanumant Svāmī was the great-great-grandson of Śreshṭh, the brother of Rāmdās, and wrote a prose biography of the Svāmī. It is the work upon which Grant Duff, and more recently, Mr. Kincaid and Mr. Parasnis have depended.¹ Mr. Dev says that Hanumant wrote a small bakhar about 1793, and about 1817 he requested Malhār Rāmrāv and Raṅga Lakshmaṇ to enlarge it, which was done.² It is possible that Hanumant reviewed the manuscript before he died. The bakhar has passed through many editions, and in the Satkāryottejak Sabhā at Dhulia there are eight hand-written copies, which were found in such places as the Pimpalgāon maṭh, Āmbaḍ, Tākerlī, Chāphaḷ and Domgāon. Without doubt, the work contains a good deal of fanciful material; and therefore Mr. Bhāte and Mr. Keluskar discount it as a reliable source, although the former readily admits that it has a certain amount of reliable information.³ The historical student necessarily must distinguish between the simple traditions and the later

¹ *H.M.P.*, Vol. I, p. 182. ² *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 20.

³ Keluskar, p. 534.

embellishments which are more or less mixed up together. In my judgment, Hanumant's bakhar is the most serious attempt to give a *complete* picture of the Svāmī, the other biographies being much more fragmentary. In spite of the traditional dates and the numerous miracles, it has gathered together most of the known facts, and many of its conclusions are supported by the diary, which is supposed to have been written a few days after the death of Rāmdās. It seems plausible to assume, therefore, that Hanumant had access to the diary when writing his biography. In so far as the miraculous is concerned, practically all of the sources contain a large element of it; and this is easily understandable, when we realize that even to-day devout Hindus have no difficulty in believing in miraculous events. Discounting the legendary elements, the fact remains that for a large number of details we are dependent upon the biography by Hanumant, supplemented by the poetical account of Giridhar.

3. Another later source is the *Dāsa Viśrāmdhāma*, by Ātmarām of Yekhehāl, of the Domgāon math. Kalyāṇ is generally considered to have been the Svāmī's most intimate disciple, and he established a famous math at Domgāon, his successors being Śivrām of Apchand, Rāmchandra of Apchand, and Ātmarām of Yekhehāl. It was Kalyāṇ's custom to take his disciples apart and tell them the story of the Svāmī's life,—a story that he could interpret better than most of the other disciples. Therefore this large work of four published volumes has a flavour that is lacking in some of the other accounts, because it gives us the story of Rāmdās as remembered by his leading disciple, although it does not bring out anything particularly new.

4. Mahīpati wrote two biographical accounts of Rāmdās, the larger one being known as the *Santaviṇaya*. It is a poetical account, written about 1774, and contains nothing new. The shorter biography by Mahīpati, *Bhaktaviṇaya*, written about 1762, also adds nothing to the general fund of information. Although Mahīpati records many legendary incidents, Mr. Edwards thinks that he does so without making undue exaggerations himself, and that he faithfully passes

on what he knows.¹ As a picture of Rāmdās, Mahīpati's account is important and gives us the atmosphere in which he lived.

5. A *Life of Rāmdās* was written early in the nineteenth century by Uddhav Suta, and published in Bombay about forty years ago. It was written in ovi metre and is now out of print.

6. There is an unpublished biography by Rājarām Prasadi of Charegāon, who lived about the time of Moropant of Baramati. It is called *Bhaktamañjalīmāla*, and has twenty-seven chapters devoted to Rāmdās.

7. Ātmarām Buva wrote a biography about 1867 and it was published in Bombay in 1891; but, like the other recent biographies, it contains no new material.

8. There are a number of short prose biographies which have been produced in recent years. Mr. V. L. Bhāve has written an account in his *Mahārūshṭra Sarasvat*, as also Mr. L. R. Pāṅgārkar, in the preface of his edition to the *Dāsboḍh*. Mr. M. A. Sahasrabudhe tells about Rāmdās in his *Life of Śivāji*. Mr. G. C. Bhāte published an important volume in 1918, entitled *Sajjaṅgaḍ and Samartha Rāmdās*. Mr. S. K. Āltekar has written a short account in his preface to the *Sulabh Dāsboḍh*. There have been a great many magazine articles published the past few years touching upon various phases of the Svāmī's life, but practically all in Marāṭhī, as very little has been written upon this subject in English. There is a chapter in the *History of the Marāṭhā People*, by Kincaid and Parasnis, Volume I, concerning Tukārām and Rāmdās. In his *Life of Śivāji Mahārāj*, translated by Mr. Takakhav, Mr. Keluskar has many references to the Svāmī.

In one of his essays, Mr. S. S. Dev raises the question as to when the life of Rāmdās ought to be written.² He has been successful in collecting hundreds of manuscripts bearing upon the subject, most of them being filed away in his office at Dhulia; and they are being gradually published by the Society in which Mr. Dev is the leading spirit. While it would seem that we have plenty of

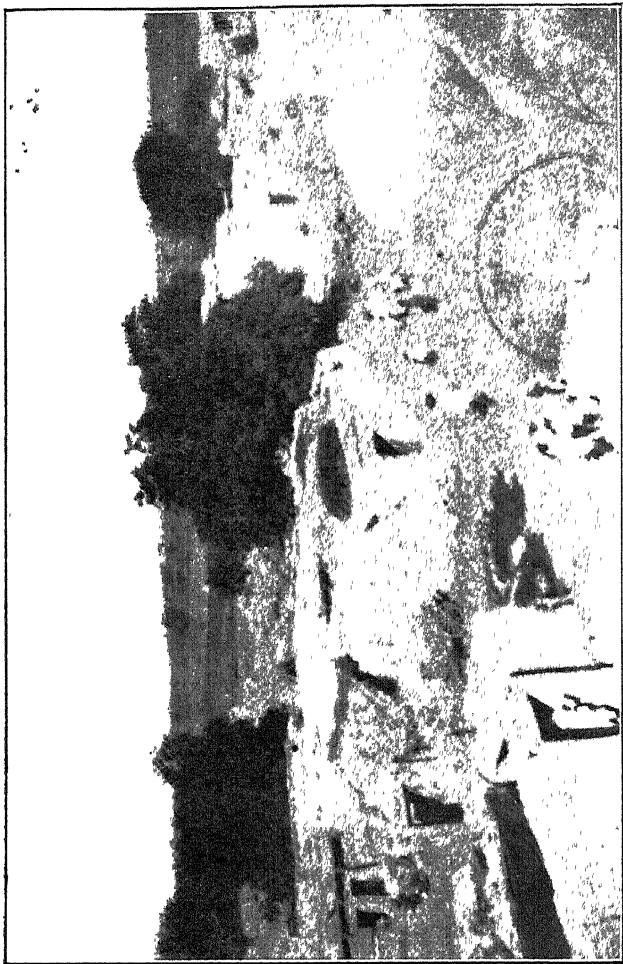
¹ Edwards, p. 70.

² *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 27.

material out of which to construct a life of Rāmdās, the fact remains that there are periods in the poet's life about which we know almost nothing. His years of study and his period of wandering are a closed book. Mr. Dev is hopeful that, after years of search, papers will be discovered to help to clear up some of these doubtful points and throw light upon these unknown periods of his life. He gives a list of definite places where manuscripts might be found, and suggests a search of all important maths and of the houses belonging to descendants of the early disciples. Since the biographical works say so little about the Svāmī's earlier years, it is my personal opinion that Rāmdās told his disciples very little about them, perhaps feeling that they had no especial significance for them. Whether some of his experiences were painful and purposely passed over in silence, or whether a peculiar sacredness attached to them, or for any other reason, it is clear that the biographers and early disciples knew little of the Svāmī's youth and training. I am inclined to believe, therefore, that any further documents which may be found will add little to our present knowledge. One other difficulty about the Svāmī's life, which the historian meets, is the complete lack of any chronological arrangement in describing his activities, so that any attempt to arrange a sequence necessarily must rest largely upon guess-work. Some inferences may safely be drawn; but with our present knowledge, it is practically impossible to fix upon a definite chronology that carries us from year to year.

THE BIRTH AND BOYHOOD OF RĀMDĀS

In the present State of Hyderabad, eleven miles from the small railway station of Pātur, is the village of Jāmb. Pātur is a few miles beyond Jalna on the railway line to Hyderabad City. Jāmb is an attractive village, situated in the midst of fertile fields, and it was here that Rāmdās was born in the year 1608. Hanumant traces his ancestry back to Kṛishṇajāī Thosar, a Brahman, who lived in Bedar about A.D. 910. His eldest son was Rāmājipant and the latter's



THE VILLAGE OF JĀMB
Where Rāmdās was born.

twenty-second descendant was Sūryājīpant, born 1568, who was the father of Rāmdās. Records agree upon two points ; namely, that the father worshipped the sun, and that he grieved because he had no children ; and traditions tell of the many austerities performed by him and his wife, Rānūbāī, in order to have children. Finally Rānūbāī became pregnant, and, as is so often the case in the biographies of great men, she is said to have had longings and visions before Rāmdās was born. Giridhar tells how she withdrew from the crowds, in order to spend quiet hours communing with the hills ; also describing her preference for monkeys, thus anticipating the belief that her son was an incarnation of Māruti. Gaṅgādhara, the elder brother, was born in the year 1605 ; Nārāyaṇ, later called Rāmdās, being born on the ninth day of the bright half of Chaitre, śaka 1530 (1608).

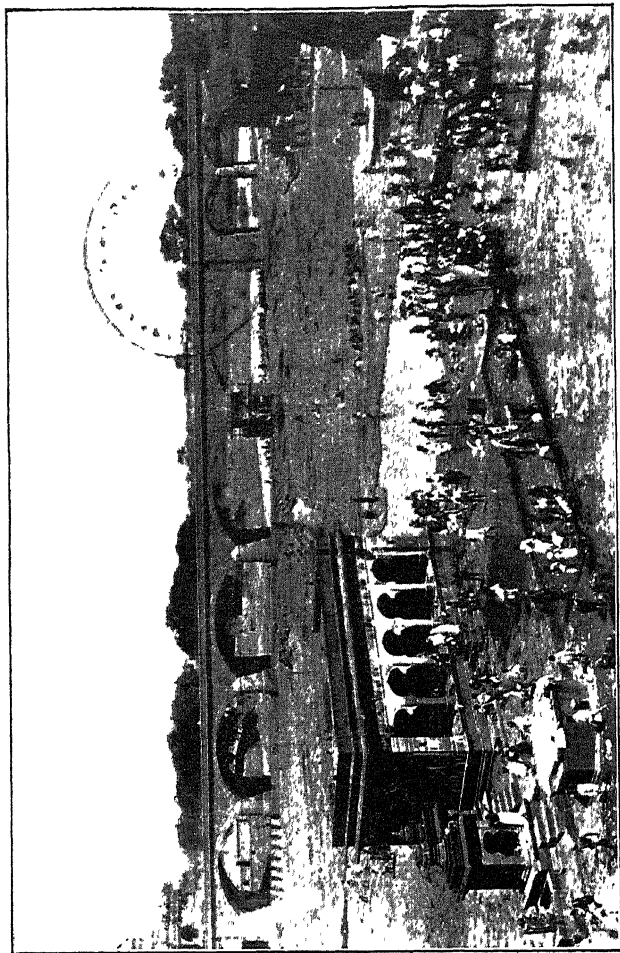
As far as we know, it was a happy, devoted family into which Nārāyaṇ was born, and he had a normal boyhood like any other Hindu lad of his day. The 'thread ceremonies' took place when each boy was five years old. The happy family circle was broken when Nārāyaṇ was seven years of age, by the death of his father. Yet, like other boys, he seems to have adjusted himself to this fact very quickly and continued to perform his boyish pranks, at one time jumping from a tree into a pool of water where he struck his forehead, and the swelling from this accident remained throughout his life. Gaṅgādhara, later called Śreshṭha, or Rāmī Rāmdās, was married at the age of seven to a girl called Parvatībāī, a daughter of Ambadkar Deśmukh. Some of the biographers, such as Giridhar and Mahīpati, describe Nārāyaṇ as a very precocious lad, even able to perform miracles. The former says that the boy quickly learned his alphabet and spent only eleven days in learning to keep accounts. It is probable that he received the schooling that was customary for boys in those days, and showed aptitude in his studies. All the writers agree that he was a boy of keen religious interest, sometimes going away from the others and sitting in solitude ; and when his brother was given a *mantra*, Nārāyaṇ asked to be likewise favoured, but was refused, presumably be-

cause of his youth. A poem found in the Domgāon math, written probably by Jagganāth Mahārāj, disciple of Kalyān, records Nārāyaṇ's disappointment when refused the mantra, and asserts that this was the reason for his leaving home at the age of twelve years.¹ Mr. V. L. Bhāve follows this interpretation in his account, but most of the other writers narrate the marriage-ceremony as the occasion for his running away. It may be that both reasons figured in his desire to leave home; yet, since the wedding story is given in some of the earliest sources, including the Diary and Giridhar, I see no reason for dismissing it as unauthentic. Another boyhood incident, narrated by Hanumant, is that in which Nārāyaṇ was taken to visit Eknāth; which visit, however, is most improbable, since Eknāth is said to have died the same year that Rāmdās was born.²

THE WEDDING

As Nārāyaṇ grew older, his interest in religious matters increased to such an extent that he began to show an aversion to the idea of marriage; and it was only after his mother pleaded with him that he consented to go through the marriage ceremony. His bride-to-be was the daughter of Bhāñjipant Bodālapurkar, who lived two miles away in the village of Āsaṅgāon, and the wedding occurred there in the house of the Deśmukh family. This house, which is no longer standing, was about sixty feet square and had a well of water within its enclosure. Near the wall on the south side was a *linga* image, and it was from this part of the house that Nārāyaṇ left, when he ran away so suddenly. The mother, feeling sure that the boy was reconciled to the idea, had completed all the arrangements; the guests were all present, and the music was going on. The cloth was held between the bride and the groom while the Brahmans sang hymns. The ceremony went on and all was well until the word 'Sāvadhān!' (be attentive) was uttered, when Nārāyaṇ evidently became terrified; for he broke away from the group and ran away, and was not seen again by his

¹ *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 47. ² *O.R.L.I.*, p. 250.



From a Nāsik photo-shop.

THE BATHING GHATS ON THE RIVER NARBUDDA AT NĀSIK

mother or brother until many years afterward. It is said that he wore only two garments, an upper and a lower ; although this seems unusual, because as a rule the bride and groom are elaborately dressed at a Hindu wedding. What happened during the next few days is uncertain, one account saying that he was given food and clothing by a Brahman whom he met, and another record asserting that he lived for three days in a banyan tree. At any rate, the boy of twelve successfully made the long journey to Pañchvaṭī, where there was a group of famous temples, situated on the banks of the Godāvarī river, near Nāsik, and the journey is said to have taken eleven days. It is quite possible that he fell in with a group of pilgrims or wandering *sādhus* and joined company with them until they reached Pañchvaṭī, where he remained.

THE YEARS AT PANCHVATĪ

This is a period about which we know little or nothing, because there are no records to throw light upon it. At this holy centre there is a famous temple of Rāma, situated in an immense courtyard, with a Mārutī temple at the entrance, and a raised platform encircling it, to be used as a resthouse by tired travellers. Within the temple proper are the idols of Lakshman, Rāma and Sītā—Rāma wearing a gold crown, the other two idols wearing silver crowns, and all the idols clothed in silken garments. In the outside courtyard, there are two Gaṇapati idols, a small Mārutī idol and a līnga. It is probable that Nārāyaṇ spent some time at this temple before he went to a place called Ṭākerlī, on the banks of the Godāvarī, two miles away. Near the river is a hill, and upon this hill there is a two-storied math to-day, where the disciple Uddhav lived. Tradition says that Nārāyaṇ lived for twelve years in this beautiful environment, deep in the study of the scriptures, performing penances, meditating and preparing for his life-work. Undoubtedly, he made frequent trips to the Rāma temple at Pañchvaṭī ; but it was the quiet, peaceful solitude of Ṭākerlī which was more suited to his taste and needs.

SOURCE OF THE MOVEMENT

It is interesting to conjecture just how and under what circumstances the young student became a devotee of Rāma ; because his father was a worshipper of the sun, and the boy broke completely from the family tradition. Who planned his studies, and who gave him his *mantra*? How was it that he came to stress so emphatically the *advaita* path, on the one hand, and the worship of Śrī Rāma, on the other? Although the tradition says that Śrī Rāma appeared to him personally, there must have been other influences shaping his thought and preparing him to receive the mantra which became a characteristic of the Rāmdāsī movement. In giving such a decided emphasis to the Vedānta philosophy, and in making Śrī Rāma the object of worship, Rāmdās was different from Tukārām and certain other contemporary poets of Mahārāshṭra, most of whom were devotees of Viṭhobā, the Vaishṇavite god at Paṇḍharpūr. While these other religious poets doubtless accepted the *advaita* teaching, it seems that they did not make it a major part of their message.

The blending of the Vedānta philosophy with the worship of Rāma was not new at the time of Rāmdās. There had been other Rāmāites who also followed the *advaita* path. Since Śaṅkarāchārya had succeeded in drawing a number of sects into allegiance to himself and to the monastery at Śrīṅgerī in Mysore, it is quite possible that Rāma worshippers were among this number. Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, with its three stages of development—beginning as an heroic poem, then showing the origin of a Rāmāite sect, and finally making Rāma the supreme god—had practically nothing to say of the Vedānta philosophy. If certain worshippers of Rāma did accept the *advaita* path, they would naturally feel the need of a sacred writing or an *Upanishad* to magnify their deity. At an uncertain date, two such *Upanishads* appeared, namely, the *Rāma-pūrvatāpanīya Upanishad* and the *Rāma-uttara-tāpanīya Upanishad*.¹ These were probably written before the seventh century A.D. It is noteworthy that Śaṅkarānanda, a

¹ O.R.L.I., pp. 189-90.

famous Śringerī *sannyāsī* of the fourteenth century, wrote the commentaries on the Rāma *Upanishads*, thus showing that at least one group of Rāmāites had close connection with Śringerī. Furthermore, a well-known work of unknown date, called the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, was prepared, giving the Rāma story from the standpoint of the advaita philosophy, and in it a number of incidents were altered in accordance with the ideas of the time.¹ The question naturally arises, therefore, whether Rāmdās had access to any of the above works. If so, it is easy to explain how his message came to be what it was.

There are certain facts which are definitely known or can be safely inferred. Rāmdās knew Sanskrit and used Sanskrit words in his poetry. There are references in his writings to the *Dnyāneśvarī*, and he was, no doubt, familiar with the *Upanishads*, the *Gītā*, Vālmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, and possibly the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, together with Eknāth's commentary on the Eleventh Skandha. During the years of preparation, Nārāyaṇ was a frequent worshipper in the great Rāma temple at Pañchvaṭī. In *Svāmubhav Dīnkar*, Dīnkar Svāmī narrates the episode in which Śrī Rāma revealed himself to Rāmdās. From the beginning of the Rāmdāsī movement till the present day, Rāmdāsīs have used the popular method (*Shoḍaśa Upachāra*) in the worship of Rāma. This method is different from that practised by the *Smārta* disciples of Śaṅkara. The Svāmī's *Rāmāyaṇa* is a Marāṭhī work based upon the *Sundarkāṇḍ* and the *Yuddhakāṇḍ* of Vālmiki. Rāmdās mentions Vālmiki but there seems to be no evidence, either internal or external, that Rāmdās drew upon the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*. The Vālmiki version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is believed by Rāmdāsīs to-day, which relates the captivity of the real Sītā in Ceylon. Nevertheless, it is also true that the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* is familiar to Rāmdāsīs at present, and is used to a certain extent for devotional purposes. While the Vedānta doctrines as taught by Rāmdās resemble those enunciated by the great Śaṅkara, there does not seem to be any evidence

¹ *O.R.L.I.*, pp. 249-50.

for assuming that Rāmdāsīs have ever had any special connection with the Śringerī maṭh. Furthermore, there is no evidence as yet that Rāmdāsīs have ever had any close contacts with the Rāmānandīs. There are, it is true, certain similarities between the two movements, but there are no references or traditions, thus far ascertained, which would lead to the assumption that the Rāmdāsīs have been greatly influenced by the Rāmānandīs.

In the light of the above facts, what conclusions can be drawn? The Svāmī's study of the *Dnyāneśvarī* must have made him familiar with the main doctrines of the Vedānta. His study of Vālmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa* and his frequent visits to the Rāma temple at Pañchvaṭī must have stimulated his interest in the worship of Rāma. Thus far we can proceed with assurance. He also felt the influence of Eknāth, Nāmdev, Tukārām and the other bhakti poets of his time. His years of wandering about India doubtless gave him a certain familiarity with religious traditions outside Mahārāshṭra. His observation of the political needs of the Deccan and his growing interest in political affairs explain his later emphasis upon such practical matters. In view of all the evidence, it seems quite clear that the Rāmdāsī movement, as such, began with the Svāmī. It was clearly a personal movement, both disciples and maṭhs being organized around the Svāmī's personality. Whether the blending of the advaita teaching with the worship of Rāma was original with him, or whether he derived the synthesis from another sect or sacred writing, is a question that seems to remain unsolved. He *may* have had contacts with other Rāmāite sects, and he *may* have been familiar with the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*. Such contacts were entirely possible during his years of wandering; and if so, they would explain the source of much that he taught. In view of the absence of references, however, we have little ground for presuming too much. If we rest on the evidence, it would seem that Rāmdās did not draw heavily upon other Rāmāite influences outside Mahārāshṭra. Further evidence may come to hand at some future date; and if so, it will help to clear up the problem regarding the source of the movement.

While the above digression emphasizes our uncertainty about the Ṭākerlī years of preparation, we do know that there Rāmdās studied the scriptures; learnt of the conditions of Mahārāshṭra; saw the distressing incidents of Moslem rule; acquired a knowledge of human nature; and, finally, decided to become a devotee of Rāma. He determined to become a wandering pilgrim himself, going about India, begging his food, and seeing the actual conditions prevailing throughout the land. It is said that the god Rāma appeared to him in a vision, directing him to go out into the world, in order to establish a new school of devotion.¹ Thus, after twelve years of preparation and study, after being duly initiated and receiving a mantra, fired with a longing to see India at first-hand and visit her shrines, eager to serve his Motherland, and dedicated to the worship of Rāma, Nārāyaṇ set out upon his travels.

THE TWELVE YEARS OF PILGRIMAGE

The only source of information we have concerning the years of pilgrimage is the poetry of the Svāmī and his disciples, where there are occasional references to the places he visited or the scenes that he saw. Hanumant does mention that he visited the following places: Benares, Gokul, Mathurā, Dvāraka, Śrīnagar, Badrinārāyan, Kedar-eśvar, the Himālaya mountains, Jagannāth, the Southern Coast, Rāmeśvar, Laṅka (Ceylon), Gokaṛṇāmahābḷeśvar, Kishkindha, Karvir, Paraśurāmkshetra, Mahābḷeśvar, Trimbakeśvar, Jāmbgāon, Ṭākerlī and Paithan. The Diary adds Bibhiṣan to this list and says that Uddhav has written in detail about the years of pilgrimage, evidently referring to the fact that different disciples made a record of different phases of the Svāmī's life, after his death, according to an agreement made among themselves.

A small poem of fourteen verses, written by Rāmdās, was found in the Ṭākerlī maṭh, and in this poem he gives some of his observations in connection with his travels and the beginning of his movement. The poem goes on to

¹ *Svānubhava-Diṅkar*, ch. xvi, sec. 4, Dhulia publication.

say that 'the people are oppressed by the Muhammadans, with the result that many are starving. Life and property are in danger and forced conversions are taking place. Human corpses are left on the ground uncared for, while those who are living have insufficient clothing.' Because of this situation, the Svāmī's heart was filled with pity; and having made up his mind to establish a new religious movement (*sampradāya*), he prepared the following instructions: 'Thoughtfulness and contemplation will enable one to secure salvation; and to this end associations should be formed. As a swimmer saves a drowning man, so should the disciple eschew laziness and give wisdom to the foolish ones. Avoiding intimacy with those who are proud, they should give shelter to all willing listeners, particularly intelligent children of relatives, who should be taught that by falling at the feet of Śrī Rāma all their misery and sufferings will disappear. All those who accept this doctrine should be taught the mantra, and when they are sent to me I will give them the necessary instructions.'

ESTABLISHING A NEW MOVEMENT

About the year 1644, Rāmdās felt the call to return to Mahārāshṭra, the land of his youth, where he had been born and brought up. He did not take up his residence near his birthplace, nor at Ṭākerlī, where he had spent his years of preparation. He chose rather the Satāra area, a beautiful part of the Deccan, stretching along the Western Ghāṭs, with its river valleys and fertile fields. Here the rivers flow swiftly during the rainy season, the rugged mountains lift their peaks above the lowering mists of the valleys and the golden sunsets gladden the heart. To a man like Rāmdās, who loved Nature and spent hours in solitude communing with the hills, it was a land appealing and attractive. Furthermore, he felt at home among the people, for they were his own people and he knew their temporal and spiritual needs. Here he decided to stay, therefore, and while his roving spirit kept him constantly on the move, so that no one knew exactly where to find

him at a given moment, yet he carried on his work from a chosen centre and made a particular spot his official residence.

Nestling among the hills, by the side of a small stream, is the village of Chāphaḷ, which became his headquarters ; and it was in this village that he built the temples of Rāma and Mārutī in 1648. Hanumant says that the images of Rāma and Parvatī were found by Rāmdās in the Kṛishṇa river, the former being installed at Chāphaḷ, while the latter was set up at Paraḷī (Sajjāṅgaḍ). Since the latter place was not given to Rāmdās till many years afterward, this tradition does not impress us as being historical. A letter written by Divākara states that in 1654 Rāmdās went to Śivthar, where he planned to spend ten years in writing poetry.¹ Hence it is probable that the years 1644 to 1654 were spent in laying the foundation for his movement and beginning the organization. That the Svāmī had a genius for organization is evident from the fact that there are still over forty maṭhs that are connected with his movement, and have successfully withstood the ravages of time. It was the Svāmī's ability to link his teachings with a definite organization which made him distinctive and different from other poet-saints, such as Tukārām or Eknāth.²

The accounts of his life are so vague that it is impossible to follow his movements during these years. It is probable that his ideas took shape gradually as he wandered about from village to village, giving kīrtans and interpreting the Hindu scriptures. Wherever he went, people were attracted by his magnetic personality, disciples flocking to him from all sides. There were certain places which he loved to visit, such as the village of Śahāpūr, where he established a Mārutī temple.³ To the left of this temple there is a cave where he often used to sit. Near by, on the Chandra-giri mountain, there was another favourite cave, which has been described in detail by Bhīmasvāmī Śahāpurkar. He often went to Masur, where he established a Mārutī temple,

¹ See above, pp 19 ff.

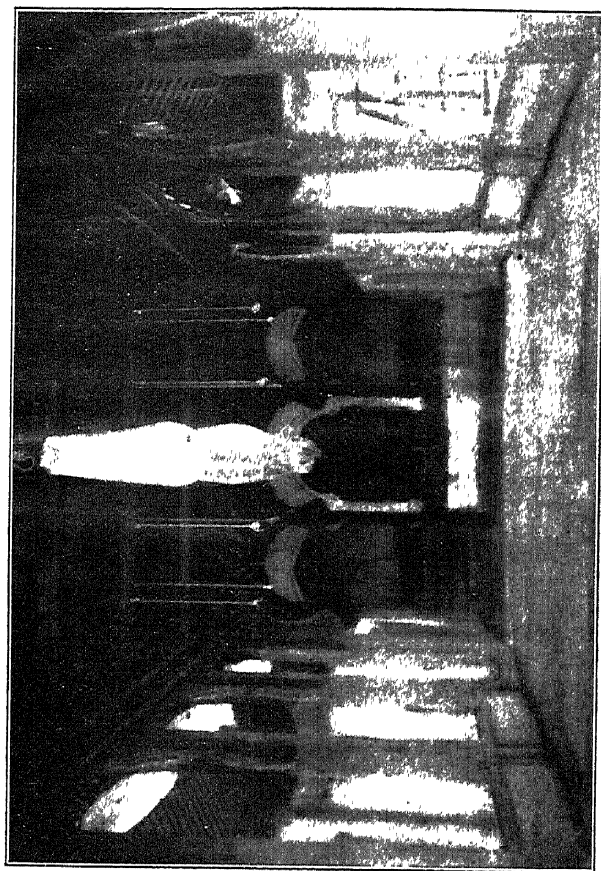
² Edwards, pp. 179, 180. *O.R.L.I.*, p. 300.

³ *Kavitā*, see Introduction.

and, according to Hanumant, he established Mārutī temples in seven other places, namely, Umbraj, Śīrola, Padālī, Pārgāon, Māngāon, Hīnganvādī and Bāhe. Half a mile from Chāphaḷ, upon the side of a hill, is a cave called Rāmghaḷ, where the Svāmī frequently sat. There is a small hole in the ceiling of the cave through which one can enter a small chamber above, where four people can sit crowded together; and the lower chamber is divided into two sections by a wall, one part being used for washing purposes. From this cave there is a wonderful view, the mountain ranges stretching off into the distance, with the fertile river valleys winding in and out. While the Svāmī loved all this beautiful scenery and spent many hours in solitude, he did not content himself with a passive life, and it was not long before he was surrounded by a loyal group of disciples, who came to him for instructions and delighted to do his bidding, the Chāphaḷ buildings being a testimony to their devotion.

HIS RELATIONS WITH OTHERS

The records narrate many incidents which emphasize the friendly, sympathetic spirit of Rāmdās as he moved in and out among the people. A goodly number of disciples joined his movement from a sense of gratitude and love, or because the Svāmī had befriended them during an emergency. As he wandered through the villages, it was his practice to deal out medicine to those who were ill. When he met ridicule or scorn, or came into contact with evil practices, he sought to win the people by kindness rather than by rebuking them; as, for example, when he remonstrated with a group who were flippantly dramatizing the god Rāma and showing their disrespect. During the years of his wanderings, he had never forgotten his mother and brother; and when a Paithan Brahman told him that his mother longed for a visit, he immediately set out for his old home. After reaching his native village and arriving in front of his house, he uttered the words, 'Jai, jai, Raghuvir Samarth!' (Victory to Rāma, the all-powerful one!) As Hanumant tells the story, when his mother



From a photo by the Author.

INTERIOR OF RĀMDĀSĪ TEMPLE AT CHĀPHAL.

asked, 'Are you Nārāyaṇ, my son?' he replied, 'Yes, mother, I am Nārāyaṇ, your son.' After remaining with his mother and brother for several days, he received her permission to return to his chosen work, which had claimed him all these years. The intimate relationship which Rāmdās had with his own disciples is clearly shown by the letter which he wrote to Raghunāth Bhaṭ Gosāvī in 1674, while suffering with malaria at Chāphaḷ. He says, 'Let your affection for me grow stronger every day. I have written all this because you mean so much to me. You are as dear to me as Divākaraḥ, and since it will not be possible for me to express my gratitude properly when we meet, I have written you this long letter. Whatever is mine is yours, and you are mine; for we both belong to God.'

Not being content with the teaching of words, the Svāmī made it his practice to reinforce his advice by his own actions, when seeking to influence others. Giridhar says that at one time he was sitting on the bank of the Kṛishṇa when it was in full flood, and a cry of help came from a man who was drowning. A spectator looked at Rāmdās and despised him for being indifferent to the man's need, but quickly changed his opinion when he saw the Svāmī leap into the river and rescue the drowning man. Coming forward humbly, he confessed his shameful thoughts and asked the holy man's forgiveness. On another occasion he saw a group of people who were lazy, and he rebuked their shiftlessness by taking a broom and sweeping the temple courtyard. Once he attended a marriage ceremony at which there were dancing women; and instead of rebuking his host, he sat with downcast eyes throughout the whole performance. After a ceremony of idol-worship, he once offered food to a group of orthodox Brahmans, which they refused to accept, suggesting that they be given a larger present. This so displeased the Svāmī that he invited a group of low-caste people to visit him; and he gave food to them, after they had bathed in the Māṇḍevī river, much to the discomfiture of the humiliated Brahmans, who repented of their selfish pride and gladly accepted whatever else was offered to them.

THE FIRST DISCIPLES

The various accounts are not clear as to when and how each disciple joined his movement. Hanumant says that he met Anantbhaṭ and Divākərbhaṭ while on a four months' visit to Mahābṛeśwar, where he established a Mārutī image and put Anantbhaṭ in charge of it. He lived for a time near Māhulī on the Jaranda mountain, taking his daily bath at the confluence of the Kṛishṇa and Vena rivers, and here he made it a practice of playing with the children in the sand. During this visit he met Jairām Svāmī and Raṅganāth Svāmī for the first time. At Śahāpur, when he arrived at the house of a Brahman, he found the women weeping bitterly because, they said, the Muhammadan officials had arrested Bājipant, the head of the family, owing to a dispute over revenue, and had taken him to Bijapur. Rāmdās told them not to weep but to utter the words, 'Rām, Rām,' and Bājipant would be released. On the eleventh day, so the story goes, Bājipant returned home; and, in gratitude for this event, he, with his wife, Satībāī, and his father-in-law, Āmbājipant, all became disciples. Saying that she would take no food until she found Rāmdās in order to thank him personally, Satībāī went in search of him, and at last found him on the Chandragiri mountain, where she fell prostrate before him. He was greatly pleased with her devotion and put her in charge of the Mārutī temple which he had established at Śahāpur. Hanumant says that it was a *māmlatdār* (government official) who gave Rāmdās the Chāphaḷ property for his maṭh, after becoming a disciple. It was at Chāphaḷ that Ākkābāī, a child widow and the daughter of Rudrājipant Deshpānde, became a disciple. At Miraj, Rāmdās met another child widow named Venābāī, who was the daughter of a certain Deśpānde and who became one of his most loyal disciples.

At Karvir, a Brahman named Parājipant, his sister, and her two sons, named Āmbājī and Dattobā, all became disciples. Āmbājī was skilful in handwriting, and therefore Rāmdās often asked him to write down poems as he composed them. Once while staying at Masur, Rāmdās desired to cut off a branch of a mango tree which stood

in front of the temple. Āmbājī immediately climbed the tree, but while in the act of cutting it, fell down into a well. People thought that he had been drowned, until Rāmdās called out, 'Āmbājī, are you well?' He replied, 'I am all right,' and came out. This fanciful story is told to explain why his later name was Kalyāṇ, which means 'well' or 'safe'; but while there doubtless was some incident such as this to account for this new name, it is probable that the later tradition underwent a good deal of embellishment. Hanumant says that among the many disciples, there were seventy-two who became important *mahants* (in charge of monasteries); and of the seventy-two, at least twenty were related to Rāmdās by close personal ties.¹

ESTABLISHING TEMPLES AND MAṬHS

Mention has already been made of the places where Rāmdās established Mārutī temples, which, according to Hanumant, were established between the years 1645 and 1650. In a number of places he established temples of Rāma, Lakshmaṇ and Sītā, notably at Chāphaḷ, Sajjaṅgaḷ and Ṭākerlī, in the latter place the idols being established in the maṭh itself. Wherever he went, Rāmdās probably followed a customary procedure. As he went about, he gave kīrtans and aroused interest among the people, those most interested ultimately becoming disciples. The leading disciple organized the group and established a maṭh,

¹ *Biography*, by Hanumant Svāmī, p. 89.

Note.—The twenty intimate disciples of Rāmdās were Uddhav, Kalyāṇ, Raṅgobā, Ākkābāi, Venūbāi, Satībāi, Śahāpurkar, Trimbak, Devdās, Mahādev, Musalrām, Maunī Gosāvi, Bholarām, Anandbhaṭ, Bhikāji, Āpā, Dattātraya, Rokadarām, Hanumant, Divūkarbhaṭ and Bājipant Śahāpurkar. This is the list given by Hanumant. The title Gosāvi is generally put after each name, or quite often, Svāmī.

Additional disciples were: Raṅganāth, Jairām, Diṅkar, Mahārudra of Varhad, Bālakarām, Śrīdhar of Rāmtēk, Bhairav of Gokarna, Janārdan of Surat, Śivram of Telaṅgāon, Sadaśiva of Raichur, Raghunāth, Ānand Murti, Keshav, Vāman, Bhānjī, Nursu, Niraṅjan, and a number of Śivāji's officials. Bhīmāji of Śahāpur was also a disciple, and the records mention the names of at least eighteen female disciples.

perhaps at first in a temporary place ; later, as the number grew, establishing a permanent centre. Very often a maṭh and a temple were established side by side, the building of the one being closely followed by the building of the other; and the expense of the work being generally met by voluntary subscriptions. Śivājī, for example, contributed indirectly toward the building of the temple and maṭh at Chāphaḷ.

There is no way of knowing just how many maṭhs were established by the Svāmī and his disciples, Mr. S. S. Dev estimating that 1,100 maṭhs were established in all. Many were organized by Rāmdās himself, but a great many others owe their origin to the zeal of his followers, both in Mahārāshṭra and in other parts of India where Marāṭhī was not spoken. Mr. Bhāve also thinks that 1,100 is a conservative estimate ; and whether that number be an exaggeration or not, it is clear that there must have been several hundred, since even to-day there are at least forty-two maṭhs in active operation. About a dozen of them have been visited by the writer. They are each in charge of a mahant, or chief disciple, who is generally married. All the mahants look up to the chief mahant of the Chāphaḷ and Sajjaṅgaḍ maṭhs for guidance or instructions. He is the so-called leader of the Rāmdāsī movement to-day. As the number of maṭhs increased, Rāmdās felt it necessary to draw up a system of instruction for the guidance of the mahants, giving them a definite plan of action and method. They were authorized to initiate disciples and to give the Vedic mantra of thirteen syllables to those who had fulfilled the conditions of discipleship. Each mahant was expected to visit Rāmdās at frequent intervals and make reports, thus enabling him to keep in close touch with them all. The maṭhs were thus centres of influence, spreading the teaching of this newly organized sect over the countryside ; sending out wandering disciples, who went from village to village as the spirit moved them ; gathering crowds nightly to listen to a kīrtan, or during the day to hear instruction ; and, finally, offering a place where huge crowds might gather for special occasions, particularly in honour of the god Rāma.

RAMDAS'S LITERARY ACTIVITIES

IN 1654, as has been already stated, Rāmdās retired to Śivthar¹ for ten years, in order to write poetry, and put his teaching into permanent form ; so, at least, it was stated in a letter. He had already spent about ten years in wandering about the Deccan, giving kīrtans, enrolling disciples and organizing his movement, until now it doubtless included hundreds, perhaps thousands, of followers. While he had probably written many poems before this, he felt that the time had now come when he should concentrate upon the task of writing poetry and furnishing his movement with definite instruction, information and inspiration ; therefore he began the writing of the *Dāsbodh*. This is a poetical work of twenty chapters, written in the ovī metre, concerning a great variety of subjects, religious, philosophical and ethical ; and in the judgment of Marāṭhī literary critics, it is an important book in Marāṭhī literature. The internal evidence shows that the first seven chapters were written as a unit,² the eighth chapter being added later, and additional chapters being written as need arose ; while the whole work was doubtless finished several years before his death. We have no way of knowing just when these chapters were written, or how long he remained at Śivthar, although the contents of the chapters furnish a few clues that enable one to draw inferences.

The Svāmī was a prolific writer and a considerable part of his poetry is still unpublished, according to Mr. S. S. Dev. What may be called his literary gem is a group of 205 verses, giving practical advice to the mind, called *Manāche Śloka*. He wrote many verses of devotion, chiefly addressed to Rāma, called *Karuṇāśhṭake*, and he also wrote a book of poetry, based on two sections of Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, and this is called his *Rāmāyaṇa*. Details of these works will be given in Chapter VIII. Other works include the *Juna Dāsbodh*, abhaṅgs, collections of 100 verses (śatakas), collections of five verses (pañchakas), *Śadriṇu Vivechan*, and a Sanskrit poem called the *Dās-*

¹ Śivthar is in the mountains, not far from Bhor State and only a few miles from Raigaḍ.

² See Bhāte, pp. 26-40.

Gītā. Mr. S. S. Dev estimates that there are a thousand pages of his poetry still unpublished, much of it written by the hand of Kalyāṇ. A list of this unpublished poetry will be given in detail in a later chapter.¹ While his literary productivity lasted throughout his life, it responded to given situations, so that it doubtless varied much from year to year. His genius was called forth upon special occasions, or when the disciples needed instruction, or when he felt the inspiration of his own religious moods. Even political events and the practical needs of the people were instrumental in calling out his muse. But, in general, his poetry lacks beauty of form and expression. His greatness does not consist in the charm of his poetical imagery, other poets being superior to him in this regard. There are certain exceptions to this, however. In the *Manāce Śloka*, *Karuṇāṣṭake* and some of the abhangs, he proved his ability to write polished Marāṭhī poetry with sweet-sounding phrases and beautiful imagery. The *Dāsboḍh* became the scripture most revered by his followers. It is to-day a work that is revered by all Hindus of Western India. Some students believe that the present *Dāsboḍh* is an enlargement of the *Juna Dāsboḍh*, which is a shorter work of twenty-one chapters upon various themes.

Besides writing poetry, Rāmdās carried on a more or less extensive correspondence with various disciples or officials ; this necessity arising from the fact that his movements were so uncertain that they were never sure of finding him in person. Hence important matters were often settled by correspondence ; and a few of these letters have come down to us, revealing a good deal of his character and motives. Two such letters were found in the Ḍomgāon maṭh, one from Keshav Svāmī to Rāmdās, and the other from Rāmdās to Keshav Svāmī, these letters giving ample testimony to the great love which the disciple had for his *guru*.² After Rāmdās became intimate with Śivāji, letters passed between them, and the Svāmī doubtless had occasion to write to other officials or to

¹ Ch. VIII ; see also the Introduction to *Don Charitṛe*. .

² *V.V.*, Vol. II, sec. 92.

have such letters written by his disciples. The letter of Rāmdās to Bhīmasvāmī, found in the biography written by the latter, illustrates the intimate friendliness existing between the Svāmī and his disciples, and shows how he was constantly urging them to seek goodness. He wrote, 'By means of knowledge, birth and death cease to be, and we achieve heaven. The nine kinds of devotion lead to God. To listen and to think; first to know and then to act;—this is the kind of life that bears fruit. When reality becomes known, the rich man is on the same level with the poor man; and, therefore, let us not be satisfied with mere words, but seek their true meaning, in order that we may gain spiritual knowledge. My affection for you cannot be put into words; for we are deeply indebted to each other. Although separated from you by distance, yet I think of you constantly; and this thought is a great comfort to me. Our hearts go out to each other; for we are equally zealous in the worship of Rāma.'

LIFE INCIDENTS

There are numerous traditional stories about the Svāmī recorded in the various biographies; and while many of them have probably received embellishment, yet not a few give the impression of being founded upon historical fact. Bhīmasvāmī Śīrgāvkār tells of the pandit from Benares (Kāśī) who was so skilful in discussion that he kept a knife tied to his sacred thread, assuring all opponents that he was ready to cut out his tongue if he were defeated. When he saw numerous people reading the *Dāsboḍh*, he felt a desire to enter into a discussion with the author. He was, therefore, conducted to Rāmdās by Kalyāṇ. Preceded by torches, he was received with great honour; but, proud and haughty, he failed to return the Svāmī's bow, demanding, instead, an immediate answer to his queries. Asking him why he was in darkness, the Svāmī called to a low-caste man who was in the vicinity, and the latter answered all his questions satisfactorily. Deeply chagrined, the pandit became a disciple of the Svāmī, and made a copy of the *Dāsboḍh* before he returned to Benares. On the way home, he stopped at the house of a Brahman woman

named Bahinabāī, who heard him reading the *Dāśbodh*. Vowing to fast till she met the Svāmī, she finally found him and became his disciple.

Rāmdās once called at the house of an official named Nīlopant, who had become a disciple, and asked for food. There was very little fuel in the house; but the wife, Nirubāī, burned some valuable shawls in order to prepare soup, which the Svāmī gratefully ate, Nirubāī receiving a mantra as a reward for this devotion. When the husband returned home, he asked for a boon; and, according to Bhīmasvāmī, Rāmdās gave them a cocoanut, prophesying that a son would be born to them. This proved to be true; and the boy was called Rāmchandra, the Svāmī himself performing his thread ceremony twelve years later. Another incident concerns the disciple of a Gosāvī who left home one day, but before going he told his wife to serve the holy man faithfully. During the husband's absence, the Gosāvī made improper advances to her and she offered no resistance. The husband returned, but made no complaint when he found that his wife had been unfaithful to him. In commending this self-sacrifice of the disciple, Rāmdās favoured him with a mantra; but the Gosāvī, overcome with shame, repented and fled.

The Svāmī frequently tested the loyalty of his followers. One day when he was depressed by their pride, says Bhīmasvāmī Śīrgāvkār, he took a sword in his hand, and, clad only in a loin cloth, he said that he would kill anyone who bowed before him during the morning devotions. No one dared to approach him; and he therefore withdrew into the forest, the report spreading about that he had gone mad. About a month later Kalyāṇ arrived at Sajjaṅgaḍ and immediately went to his guru, putting red powder upon his forehead and betel leaves in his mouth. In spite of the Svāmī's threat, Kalyāṇ bowed before him and then the saint, throwing away his sword, embraced the disciple, saying that he alone was a true follower. The Svāmī's ability to convince others of error is attested by numerous incidents, such as that which narrates the conversion of sixty robbers, or the account of Vāman Paṇḍit, who became a noted disciple. The utter devotion of the

disciples to him is also brought out in the many incidents told by the biographies, such as the story of the one who drank the contents of the cuspidor, and who therefore was given the name Bholarām, which means simpleton.

Hanumant tells a unique incident in connection with the death of the Svāmī's mother. Rāmdās told his disciples that he wanted to sleep for fifteen days, and that therefore they should lock his room from the outside, opening his door on the sixteenth day. These instructions were carried out by the disciples; Rāmdās, in the meantime, having gone to Jāmb to visit his mother. To his dismay he found that she was seriously ill, in spite of the fact that Śreshṭh was taking the utmost care of her and giving her every attention. His going at that time was very opportune, and his mother was overjoyed to see him; but she lived for only a few days, and passed away on the third bright half of Jyeshṭha, śaka 1577 (A.D. 1655), uttering the words, 'Jai, Jai, Rāma!' (Victory to Rāma!) On the sixteenth day, the disciples opened the door of the Svāmī's room, but found it empty. They learned that he was sitting in a neighbouring temple with his head shaven; and, when they inquired the reason, he informed them that his mother had died and he was in mourning for her.

Once Rāmdās was walking through a field of ripe grain with a group of disciples, who asked his permission to pluck some of the ears. Going to a village, which was near, they sat in the shade of a mango tree and prepared a fire in order to parch the ears which they had plucked. Suddenly the *pāṭel* (headman) of the village came running, and thinking Rāmdās to be the leader of a gang, struck him upon the back with some stalks of grain. The disciples, in their turn, began to thrash the *pāṭel*, until he was rescued and liberated by the Svāmī, who told them that they were in the wrong, inasmuch as the ears of grain belonged to the *pāṭel*. Hanumant goes on to say that Śivājī visited Rāmdās shortly afterward, saw the scars upon his back, and became greatly incensed when he heard the whole story from the disciples; but Rāmdās would not allow him to punish the man. 'We are the guilty ones,' said he, 'if punishment is to be given,

because we stole the grain'; and he persuaded Śivājī to present the pāṭel with a grant of land.

There are a number of incidents which show the strict discipline which the Svāmī maintained among his followers, especially among the mahants. He caned one mahant because he gave a mantra to another without adequate preparation; and another was caned for immorality. When he saw a group of disciples with three prostitutes, he forbade their performing kīrtans for three years.¹ He was so shocked by a dramatic play which dramatized the god Rāma that he stood up all through the performance. Giridhar says that when a Vedic Brahman destroyed some flower garlands, saying that they were *māyā* (unreal), Rāmdās rebuked him, telling him that since we worship *God* by the use of qualities, we must not regard the *world* as being devoid of qualities. The strictness of Rāmdās was not heartless, however, and his discipline was based upon genuine affection, so that his disciples were willing to do anything for him. He once departed into the forest without taking his food; and, after waiting till sunset, Kalyāṇ tied the food in a cloth and set out to find him. He found the Koina river in full flood, but, without hesitating, he swam across and continued the search. He finally found two men with torches and they brought him to the Svāmī, who was immensely pleased at this evidence of Kalyāṇ's devotion. Venābāi loved to cook for him; and Premaḷ used to rub his feet when he returned, tired out from walking.

Mahīpati narrates two unusual incidents, the first concerned with the desire of Rāmdās to commit suicide by hanging himself. As he was about to commit the act, he had a vision of the god Mārutī and he desisted. The other is the story of Gāgābhaṭ Paṇḍit, a Brahman of Benares, who was well versed in the four śāstras, and who was so jealous of the Svāmī's fame that he rebuked Śivājī for reading the *Dāsbodh*, saying that Marāṭhī was not worth reading. Śivājī replied that the *Dāsbodh* was written on the authority of the Sanskrit śāstras. Some time later,

¹ *Pratāp*, ch. xviii, p. 107, v. 7.

Gāgābhaṭ heard a kīrtan given by Rāmdās for Śivājī and his ministers, and thereupon became a devoted disciple.

HIS RELATIONS WITH OTHER RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

The Svāmī lived during one of the great periods of Marāṭhī literature, and included among his contemporaries such poets as Eknāth, Mukteśvar and Tukārām, Vāman Paṇḍit being one of his own disciples. While he never met Eknāth, since the latter died the same year that he was born, he was familiar with his works and greatly influenced by his teachings.¹ Both poets were monists, and both were bhaktas, although Eknāth was more thoroughgoing in his bhakti than Rāmdās, and did not lay so much stress upon pantheism. Rāmdās and Tukārām were born in the same year and had slight contacts with each other, perhaps meeting once or twice; but Tukārām died in 1648, at the very beginning of the Svāmī's lifework. The Diary says that they met in 1648 at a dinner, and adds that Rāmdās went to Paṇḍharpūr the following year. Bhīmasvāmī Śirgāvkar says that Tukārām went to visit Rāmdās and was so pleased with his kīrtan that he stayed three days. There is every reason for believing that the two men had a profound respect for each other and that Rāmdās was influenced by the deeply stirring abhangs of Tukārām.

While the records agree that Rāmdās went to Paṇḍharpūr at least once, it is equally clear that he was not a devotee or *varkari* of Viṭhobā, the Paṇḍharpūr god. Tukārām refers to Rāmdās in a letter which he sent to Śivājī, in which he suggested that the Svāmī would be a suitable guru for him; but since the genuineness of this letter is questioned, we must lay no stress on it.² On one occasion Rāmdās is said to have expressed his disapproval of the negative qualities in the teaching of contemporaneous poets; and, in making this criticism, he may have had Tukārām in mind, but this is not certain. It is true that the Svāmī took an active interest in affairs of state during his later years; and to this extent his teaching differed from Tukārām's; but there

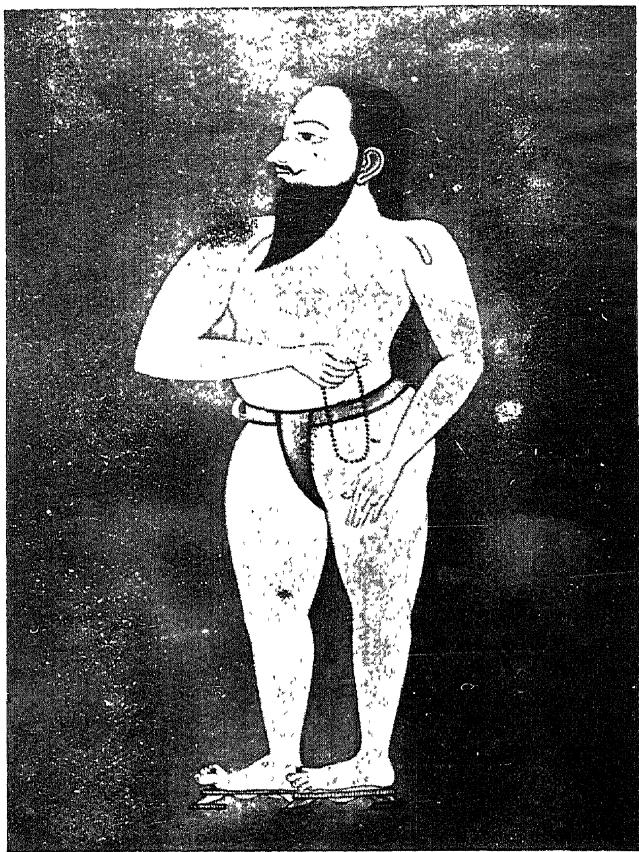
¹ Keluskar, see p. 515, note. *O.R.L.I.*, p. 250.

² Edwards, p. 18. Keluskar, p. 523.

is every reason to believe that the two poets had mutual respect for each other, and that, while Tukārām was alive, they had a great deal in common. The latter passed away in 1648, just as Rāmdās was establishing his movement. The relationship between the two movements was friendly tolerance, with occasional contacts, yet without any direct connection. To be sure, there was no occasion for a conflict between the worshippers of Rāma and those of Viṭhobā, an incarnation of Kṛishṇa; for these movements were separate in origin and appealed to different groups. The movement of Rāmdās included many Brahmans and people from the more intellectual groups, while the Paṇḍharpūr movement included more of the common people and, in this sense, was more inclusive. Although Rāmdās made very few references to Viṭhobā or Paṇḍharpūr, his disciples occasionally went there to honour the god; and they still do so, if they happen to be in that vicinity.

There were a number of contemporaneous poets who owed their first impulse to the Svāmī, or at least who became his grateful disciples, among them being the following, Vāman Paṇḍit (1636–96), Jayarām Svāmī (died about 1672), and Raṅganāth Svāmī (lived near Nasik about 1608).¹ Hanumant tells in detail of the meeting between Rāmdās and Vāman Paṇḍit, the great scholar who had studied Sanskrit at Benares for twelve years and had won great fame for his prowess in literary controversies. A ghost appeared to him in a vision and told him that his pride of learning would cause his ruin, unless he would submit to Tukārām of Dehu, who would show him the right path. Giving his wealth away as charity, he thereupon went to visit Tukārām, who was living at Ālandī, and he there bowed before him. Tukārām said that it was not fit for a Brahman to bow down to a Śūdra, and that therefore he should go and submit to Rāmdās. Vāman went to Rāmdās, as Tukārām directed, and the Svāmī told him to perform penances for twelve years, returning at the end of that time for discipleship. This he did; and after Rāmdās had favoured him with a mantra, as he had promised, he urged him to

¹ Keluskar, p. 515.



By the courtesy of Mr. S. S. Dev.

RĀMDĀS

From an old drawing, made during his lifetime, by his disciple Meru Svāmi. The original is preserved and worshipped at the Sajjangad Math.

write Marāṭhī poetical works, so that the common people might be helped. Vāman complied with this request and wrote a number of works, one of which was a famous commentary on the *Gītā*.

In *Śrī Samarthapratāp*, Giridhar tells of an imaginary feast given by Rāmdās to the poets of Mahārāshṭra, past and present, and each one was given food bearing the name of the author's chief work.¹ The poets sat in two rows, the ancient poets being in one row and the contemporary poets being in another. The list of poets included Rāmānanda, Mukteśvar, Mukundarāj, Harināth, Dnyāndev, Muktabāi, Nāmdev, Rohidās, Tulsīdās, Mirābāi, Śrīdhar Svāmī, Chokhāmēlā and Kabīr, among the ninety guests. This list may have been the list of manuscripts familiar to Rāmdās and read by him in secluded caves, or kept upon the shelves in the maṭhs at Chāphal and Sajjaṅgaḍ. Since Giridhar, in his youth, knew the Svāmī, it is very probable that he also knew something of the Svāmī's library. This inference is also supported by the references in the Svāmī's poetry, showing that he had a knowledge of the works of many other writers, and it is probable that he drew freely upon all of them, still retaining in full measure, however, his originality of arrangement and his independence of judgment.

THE APPEARANCE AND HABITS OF RĀMDĀS

Although the various accounts of the Svāmī's life disagree as to dates and other historical facts, they succeed remarkably well in giving a vivid picture of the poet himself, even after we discount the customary miracles and exaggerations. While in a sense he was a typical Hindu sādhu, yet he possessed such an original personality that he baffles description and cannot be easily classified. Giridhar has given a detailed description of the Svāmī as he appeared in his later years, after he came to occupy a position of great influence. At the beginning of his work he doubtless lived and dressed very simply, being content with a loin-cloth and an outer robe. Giridhar describes

¹ *Dnyānodaya*, article by Dr. J. E. Abbott, June 2, 1921.

him as wearing a turban of saffron colour, with a forehead mark of saffron and musk. A garland of flowers was around his neck; over his loin-cloth he occasionally wore a silken garment, and his robe reached to his feet. He wore sandals upon his feet, rings upon his fingers and carried a leaning staff in his hand. As Bhāve says, this picture may be exaggerated and may refer to his appearance upon public occasions only. While wandering about begging for his food, it was his custom to carry the begging bowl or bag and the begging-stick (*kuberdi*).¹

In complexion he was dark, and upon his forehead there was a swelling which he had acquired when, as a small boy, he had jumped into a pool of water and struck his head. He walked with a quick, alert step. With his eyes upon the ground or his hands clasped behind his back, he often gave the impression of being indifferent to his surroundings; but this was simply his life-long habit of meditation and spiritual absorption. As time went on, he became more difficult of approach, his original shyness being intensified by the barriers of respect and authority built up around him by his devoted followers. The traditional pictures paint him with a black beard and flowing hair, and this is true of many Rāmdāsīs today, especially those who are not householders.

All through his life, even during his old age, the Svāmī was constantly on the move, his restless spirit taking him from village to village, begging his food as he went and living a life of austere simplicity. Although frequently accompanied by a group of disciples, he kept a little apart from the rest, maintaining a natural reserve, which his followers respected. With children he was openly affectionate and toward elderly people he was always courteous. His customary reserve may have led some to believe that the Samartha (Rāmdās) was lacking in affection; but this impression is refuted by his letters. Loving solitude, saddened by the sins of others, hedged in by the growing authority given to him by his followers, it was natural that

¹ The crutch or leaning staff of the beggar who has renounced the world and who practises austerities.

he maintained a dignified reserve. Underneath this reserve was a heart filled with affection, and his followers were bound to him by bonds that only death could break.

Most of the time the Svāmī lived with a small inner circle of disciples who looked after his daily needs. He allowed them to do small favours for him, such as prepare his food, bring him *pān supārī* (betel leaves and areca nut for chewing), or rub his feet. He ate very simple food, being especially fond of fruit. It was his custom to sleep a few hours in the middle of the day, spending the early morning hours and the evening hours in devotions. During the afternoon there would be spiritual inquirers who came to ask various questions; and the day was usually ended by a kīrtan, which often lasted till midnight, the Svāmī frequently spending the rest of the night in meditation or wandering about. Rāmdās ate his chief meal of the day at noon, being content with a little milk or some fruit morning and night. Giridhar tells how Rāmdās sometimes slept upon his cloak, and how, since he had no teeth, Premāḥ used to prepare special food for him, after eating which he reclined upon a couch, while Premāḥ rubbed his feet, a custom which continued eleven years, when Premāḥ suddenly disappeared.¹ A number of stories tell how the Svāmī frequently acted like a madman, frightening all those in his vicinity; and while it is not clear just what was achieved by this, he doubtless had reasons for acting in this way. Perhaps it was his desire to be left alone and not be bothered by a constant stream of visitors. Bhāve describes the great veneration with which Rāmdās was treated during the last years at Sajjaṅgaḍ, those approaching him prostrating themselves some distance away, and then, when summoned, standing before him with downcast face. When he went out for a walk, the disciples followed behind at a respectful distance and maintained a dignified silence. Giridhar says that the Svāmī was known by nine different names, namely: Rāmdās, Samārtha, Rāmī Rāmdās (the name of his brother), Dvīja, Nārāyaṇ, Dās, Udās, Devadās and Sevak.

¹ *Pratāp*, ch. xv, p. 94, v. 45-46.

CHAPTER III

RĀMDĀS AND ŚIVĀJĪ

ŚIVĀJĪ, THE DISCIPLE

As Mr. Keluskar tells the story, Śivājī had heard of Rāmdās and desired to meet him, making a journey to Chāphal for that purpose. On his arrival there, he was informed by an official, named Narsomalnāth, that the Svāmī lived a wandering life, coming and going, and at the moment was at Bahirāvgaḍ. When Śivājī inquired from the disciples, Viṭhal Gosāvī and Bhāñjī Gosāvī, who had built the temple, he was informed that his gift of money had helped to build it. Much to his astonishment, the disciples narrated the forgotten incident of how he had once been pleased by a kīrtan at the house of his family priest in Poona, given by a certain Girī Gosāvī Nāssikhar, and how he had presented the latter with a gift of three hundred pagodas (gold coins). The preacher refused it for himself, but recommended that it be given to Rāmdās Svāmī, who was erecting a temple of Rāma at Chāphal. Śivājī remembered the incident, and thereupon inspected the foundations, which he found to be imperilled by a brook, flowing from the north of the temple grounds. He ordered Narsomalnāth to divert the course of the current and build a bridge over it at the expense of the State treasury; and then, having failed to find Rāmdās, he returned to Pratāpgaḍ.

Shortly afterward he went down to Wāi and Māhulī for religious purposes; and, while at the latter place, a letter was given to him from Rāmdās, written in ovī metre.¹ Overjoyed at receiving this epistle, he replied as follows:

¹ Keluskar. p. 525.

‘Great sage, I plead guilty. Your heart abounds with forgiveness and your benedictory epistle has filled me with joy. How can I describe it? You have sung my praises, but I am not at all worthy of them. For many days I have had an ardent desire to see you and even now I propose to come into your presence. May you be pleased to receive me and appease my enduring thirst.’ This letter was sent to the Svāmī. The next day Śivāji proceeded with his retinue to Chāphaḷ, where he was informed that Rāmdās was at the temple of Hanuman at Śīnganvādī, but the disciples urged him not to go to Rāmdās until he had eaten of the special dishes which were being prepared in honour of the deity. He replied that as this was Thursday, a day specially appointed for the worship of the guru, he was determined to fast until he had seen the Svāmī. Leaving his retinue behind so as not to frighten the Saint, he went forward with two officers, guided by Divākar. The Saint was sitting beneath a fig tree in the temple garden and had just read Śivāji’s letter, chuckling to himself as he read it. Śivāji advanced, presented a cocoanut, and, after prostrating himself humbly upon the ground, stood silent. Rāmdās expressed his surprise at Śivāji’s impatience and wondered why he had not desired to see him before. Śivāji answered that he had long desired to meet him, but had been unsuccessful until now and begged his forgiveness for this seeming indifference. He requested the Saint to initiate him into the circle of spiritual disciples, which the Svāmī graciously consented to do. The sacramental requisites being brought, Śivāji bathed and went through all the solemn rites of *puja* in honour of the preceptor of his choice, Divākar officiating as priest. The solemn rite completed, Śivāji bowed his head upon the feet of his newly-found master, receiving the mystic mantra, *Śrī Rāma, jaya Rāma, jaya jaya Rāma*, (Victory to Rāma).¹ It was accompanied by an exhortation which, according to tradition, is found in the sixth section

¹ Mr. Dev says that, according to a *sanad* written upon a Portugese document, there is good evidence for believing that this really was Śivāji’s mantra.

of the thirteenth chapter of the *Dāsbodh* and is called the 'Laghu bodh' or brief instruction. Śivājī was so influenced by this advice that he expressed the desire to retire from the affairs of state and devote himself to the Svāmī; but Rāmdās uttered a strong remonstrance: 'Is it for this you have come hither, a suppliant? Your proper sphere is that of a Kshatriya, whose duty it is to defend the country and keep people from harm, as well as to serve the Gods and the Brahmans. Great exploits are yet expected from you; for the alien Muhammadan has overrun the earth. Your task is to free the land from them; for this is Rāma's will. Remember the advice that Śrī Kṛishṇa gave to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gīta*. It is the warrior's path that you must tread. Remember the valorous deeds of your ancestors and mould your conduct accordingly, without being turned aside into any other course.'

Sarkar tells the old, familiar story, how Śivājī failed to understand why Rāmdās went out daily upon his begging tour, inasmuch as he had a generous income furnished by his royal disciple.¹ The next day he placed at the Svāmī's feet a deed, making a gift of all his kingdom to the Saint. Rāmdās, in accepting the gift, appointed Śivājī as his vicar and bade him rule the realm, not as an autocratic owner but as a servant, responsible for all his acts to a higher authority. Thereupon the king made the orange-brown robe of the Rāmdāsī sādhu his national standard (*bhagva jhanda*) in order to signify the livery of his ascetic master. The tradition adds that at this time Rāmdās gave certain instructions to the king, part of which may be translated thus: 'Do not confide in people without using discrimination, but rather lean upon yourself and acquire strength to achieve that which is necessary. Seek out the way of permanent happiness and do not be tired by physical ailments. You should investigate everything for yourself, maintaining firmness, and seeking to know who are enemies and who are friends. Let your efforts be constant and your happiness unceasing. Since it is essen-

¹ Sarkar, p. 422.

tial for a leader to have courage, learn how to accomplish what you desire to do, taking advantage of every opportunity and never being content with idleness. He who shrinks from daily tasks and ceases mental activity becomes dull of intellect; but by being careful, you will become powerful.' It is also stated that the greeting between Marāṭhās, 'Rām, Rām!' was adopted by Śivājī at the Svāmī's request.

THEIR GREAT FRIENDSHIP

During the later years of Śivājī's life, he often consulted Rāmdās about spiritual matters and affairs of state, and as time passed, their friendship ripened. The wandering habits of Rāmdās were a trial to Śivājī, because he could not always find him when he wished. Therefore, after capturing the Paraḷi fort in 1673, he persuaded Rāmdās to go there and live, the latter being installed upon the top of the fort with great pomp. Rāmdās declined to live in the house which stood there, because of its dilapidated condition; and arrangements were made to build a new one. Jijoḷī Kātkar was made *havalḍār*; and, on behalf of Śivājī, he issued instructions that all the inhabitants, both civilian and military, were to be subject to the Svāmī's orders. The income of a neighbouring village was set apart for the support of the spiritual colony living upon the fort, which came to be called Sajjaṅgaḍ;¹ and the accounts were put in the hands of an official named Kondopant.² Because of the large number of holy men who came there to pay their respects, the expenses of the settlement rapidly increased and additional annual grants were given by the Government. There are a number of letters which have come down to us bearing upon this point, the following letter being typical:

'Dated śaka 1594, ninth of bright half
of Śrāvaṇa (A.D. 1672)

'From Śrī Śivājī Rājā to Dattājīpant Vakenis.'³

¹ The Sage's fort. ² Keluskar, p. 531. ³ *Patre*, Letter 10.

The letter intimates that Śrī Samartha is staying at Chāphaḷ, where there is a temple of Rāma, in whose honour a great fair is held and many festivities take place. Soldiers sometimes go there and, by quarrelling, cause trouble, showing disrespect to the deity. Hence a warning should be issued and measures taken to prevent such occurrences. Government officials should pay a visit there yearly, in order to maintain order and protect the people. The health of Rāmdās and the other Brahmans there should be inquired after.

Another letter, dated 1677, from Dattājī Trimaḷ to Vekājī Rudra, Subedār, narrates how Śivājī once went to Chāphaḷ during the nine days of the Rāmanavamī ceremonies.¹ When Rāmdās suggested to the king that the cost of these festivals should be met by the State, Śivājī agreed and made the necessary arrangements, appointing a clerk to help Rāmdās in these matters. Thus it is clear that these religious ceremonies had special government sanction, and were paid for out of the government treasury, although there were doubtless many additional voluntary gifts. These arrangements continued after Śivājī's death, additional favours being granted by Sambhājī, Rājarām and others.

There is a letter from Kalyāṇ to Divākar which shows the close bonds of friendship existing between Śivājī and his spiritual preceptor.² While the Svāmī was at Śivthar, Śivājī was ill. Hearing of this, Rāmdās ordered Kalyāṇ to go to see him, taking a gift to him as a token of his friendship. Kalyāṇ appeared before Śivājī and saluted him, whereupon the latter said, 'You have brought a gift from Rāmdās, and therefore now I am recovered,' repeating this three times. Upon this occasion he had a private talk with the king without the Svāmī's permission, and when the latter came to know of it, he rebuked his disciple, because he had entrusted this particular matter to Divākar. Rāmdās felt free to make requests of Śivājī as occasion offered, and in addition to the financial requests and those concerning state ceremonials, it is said that in the month

¹ *Patre*, Letter 19.

² *Ibid.*, Letter 50.



By courtesy of Mr. Marathe

Photographer, Saitān.

ŚIVĀJĪ, RĀMDĀS, AND KALYĀN

Wooden figures, used in Rāmdāsī processions.

of Śrāvaṇa, he asked that a crore of clay images be consecrated each year in honour of Śiva, and that a dinner be given to the Brahmans during that month.

The friendship between Rāmdās and Śivājī was so intimate that the Svāmī felt a paternal interest in Sambhājī, Śivājī's son, and other members of the royal family. Later on, when Sambhājī had assumed the throne, upon the death of Śivājī, he immediately plunged into acts of cruelty, causing the aged Svāmī much sadness of heart. He came one day to visit Rāmdās and to ask for his benediction. Rāmdās would not see him, sending him instead a letter of advice, part of which may be translated as follows: 'You should always be alert and never give way to sorrow. Quietly making up your mind about what must be done, you should proceed to do it in a calm spirit, avoiding all acts of cruelty. With a heart full of sympathy, and forgiving their previous faults, you should give due employment to your ministers, thus making them happy. Do not place obstacles in their way, since quarrels give an advantage to the enemy. Carry your undertakings through to a finish, wisely and bravely. Fear in the beginning leads to the ruin of the cause; hence have wisdom in your undertakings. Success can only be achieved when the people are contented and satisfied. With a united people you should be able to drive out the enemy, thus earning everlasting fame. In this way the Mahārāshṭra kingdom should spread in all directions. Remember King Śivājī and think less of your own life. Keep in mind his appearance and his perseverance, his exploits, his way of speaking, his manner of walking, and his capacity of making friends. Do not forget how, turning his back upon selfish happiness, he was ever active in the effort to establish the Marāṭhā kingdom. I hope that you may do even more than this, thus successfully fulfilling the purpose of your life.'

THE DATE OF MEETING BETWEEN RĀMDĀS AND ŚIVĀJĪ

I. The Argument for an Early Date

There is keen controversy to-day about the date of the meeting between Śivājī and Rāmdās, one opinion being

that they met in 1649 or thereabouts, the other that they did not meet until 1672. The early date is that accepted by the traditional accounts of the Svāmī's life. It is only in recent years that a number of scholars have raised the question about its authenticity and have rejected it as unhistorical. Both positions are fortified by weighty arguments based upon documents, and it is a difficult task to decide between them. The difference of opinion is not concerning the last eight years of the Svāmī's life, when everyone admits that Rāmdās and Śivājī were close friends, but concerns the earlier years and the Svāmī's contribution to Śivājī's achievement in establishing a Marāṭhā kingdom. To fix the first date of meeting is to decide the controversial question of just how much influence the Svāmī had on Śivājī's political activities. Therefore, to put the matter before our readers, we shall state the arguments for both positions in some detail, and then draw general conclusions.

1. The Diary of the rough notes of Antājī, copied by Gopāl, a few days after the death of Rāmdās, says that Śivājī Mahārāj was made a disciple by Rāmdās in the year 1649 in the Śingapvādī garden, and that a chapter has been written about this in *Śiva Chhatrapati*.¹ This information has the authority of Divākar Gosāvī, who asked Antājī to record the facts. This document originally belonged to the Śahāpurkars, but later came into the hands of the Upādhyes of Chāphal, and finally into the care of the late Mr. Rājwāde. If, as he maintains, it is a genuine document, it is important evidence. This is the date given in the bakhar by Hanumant Svāmī, and there is reason to believe that Hanumant was familiar with the Diary. Using Hanumant's bakhar as authority, the English historians, Grant Duff and Kincaid, have also accepted this date in their histories of the Marāṭhā people.² Mr. S. S. Dev, the late Mr. V. K. Rājwāde and Prof. D. V. Potdār of the New College, Poona, are among the eminent scholars who to-day accept this date (or, at least, a date before 1660) as the correct one.

¹ *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 21.

² *H.M.P.*, p. 183.

2. There is a letter written to Śivājī by Tukārām in the abhaṅg metre, in which the latter advises Śivājī to make Rāmdās his *guru*.¹ Tukārām died in 1648; so if this letter is genuine, it means that the date given in the Diary was entirely possible. The letter was the result of a visit that Śivājī was supposed to have made to Tukārām, and the latter's answer, declining to make his home with him. In discussing the matter, Mr. Edwards notes that the genuineness of these verses has been accepted by Sir R. G. Bhandārkar, Mr. N. V. Tilak and Prof. H. G. Rawlinson.² As regards the visit, Mr. Edwards feels that the weight of evidence supports its historicity, but admits that the reference to Rāmdās may be more uncertain.

3. Among the papers of Pratāp Singh Mahārāj, Mr. Rājwāde discovered two or three papers concerning Rāmdās, one being a poem in ovī metre, written by Bhīmasvāmī Śahāpurkar, a contemporary of the Svāmī, and describing the poet's death.³ This poem is a copy of the original and contains fifty verses. It gives the date 1649 as the time of meeting, and agrees in general with the facts as stated in Hanumant and some of the other traditional accounts, such as those written by Bhīmasvāmī Śirgāvkar, Mahīpatī and Giridhar, these last three being written somewhat later and possibly using the poem as a source. All of these accounts give the distinct impression that Rāmdās was the spiritual guide of Śivājī during a large portion of the latter's public life, and that they frequently conferred about matters of state. Hence it is a tradition that must have had great weight behind it.

4. There is a diary written by the disciple Divākar, and found among the papers of the Chāphaḷ maṭh.⁴ It was written in Bālbodh about 1678 and is now owned by Bāpurāo Upādhye.⁵ It describes how Rāmdās and Śivājī used to have secret discussions in an apartment at the southern side of the palace at Raigaḍ, to which others were not admitted, and Divākar sat upon a wooden stool near by,

¹ Spiritual adviser or preceptor.

³ *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 25.

² Edwards, p. 125. *V.S.M.R.S.*, p. 94.

⁴ *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 42.

⁵ The ordinary Marāṭhī script used in printing.

during one such interview, discussing with the other disciples present the question of 'inam grants.' Mr. Dev says that this is the first historical proof of the discussions between Śivāji and the Svāmī; his inference being that they must have been political, since they were secret.

5. At Rājāpur, in the Sanskrit library managed by Mr. R. H. Patañkar, a letter has been found which, in the opinion of some, was written by Kalyāṇ.¹ It was published a few years ago in a book called *The End of the Ādil Shāhī of Bijāpur*. This poem has fourteen short lines, and by taking the first letters of each line, the message becomes, 'The Sirdar from Bijāpur has started.' The inference is that Kalyāṇ sent this message to Śivāji from Miraj, informing him of the coming of Āfzul Khān; and it is in line with the claims of the more enthusiastic Rāmdāsīs, that the early disciples were secret spies, actively working on Śivāji's behalf.

6. In *Samarthapratāp*, the biography by Giridhar, there is a verse which says that Rāmdās caused 'the Muhammadan whose first letter is "A"' to be killed.² Mr. D. K. Panshikar has pointed out that this verse may refer to Āfzul Khān, and Mr. Dev agrees with this exegesis. Another verse in *Samarthapratāp* says that Śivāji asked the Svāmī's permission to build the temple, but that the latter declined his offer, saying that it would be done by his disciples.³ These references have a certain weight, inasmuch as Giridhar knew the Svāmī personally. Although the earliest secular records of Śivāji's kingdom make no reference to Rāmdās, the *Śivdigvijaya bahar*, written a little later, says that in 1666 Rāmdās advised Śivāji to go to the Delhi court. With these evidences in mind, such scholars as Mr. Dev and Prof. Potdār vigorously defend this date of 1649, or one in that early period, returning argument for argument. The latter points out that Rāmdās spent ten years at Śivthar, writing the first chapters of the *Dāsbodh*, and that this village is only a few miles from Raigaḍ, where Śivāji often stayed. Hence the two men

¹ *V.V.*, Vol. II, sec. 91.

² *Pratāp*, ch. xviii, v. 36..

³ *Pratāp*, ch. xix, v. 16.

must have known about each other at this time, as both were famous and well-known throughout the countryside.

7. In support of this same view, there is a letter from the disciple, Dattāji Trimaḷ, to Divākar, relating how Śivāji was staying at Birvāḍī before setting out to invade the Carnatic.¹ At that time a public meeting took place between the two at the Śivthar maṭh, after Rāmdās had paid a sudden visit to the king the night before. They discussed religious and political matters, and Rāmdās asked for the income from twenty-one villages to help defray the expenses of the Chāphaḷ temple and maṭh. The interesting point about this request is that these villages were not under Śivāji's control at that time.

8. Prof. Potdār raises other points in support of an early date. Rāmdās had established maṭhs in various places, putting shrewd, intelligent men in charge of them. Śivāji lived an active life, going up and down the country, and must have come into contact with some of these men, and thus come to know of the movement during his early years. On the other hand, Rāmdās was cautious, and probably knew a good deal about Śivāji before initiating him, because initiation was an act of supreme favour.

9. There is a letter written by Śivāji to Rāmdās in 1678, of which there are three copies extant, one found at Sajjaṅgaḍ, and two others in the Satāra district. This letter may be translated as follows :

‘To ŚRĪ RAGHUPATĪ ŚRĪ MĀRUTĪ,
‘Śrī Svāmī, the best guru! I, Śivāji, the dust of your feet, bow before you with a request. Most revered one, you have blessed me by favouring me with initiation. You instructed me to establish a kingdom and a religion, to worship Brahmans and deities, to protect the people and relieve them of their sorrows. I was advised to seek after the highest, and was told that Śrī Rāma would give me success in all that I wished to undertake. Hence, in all that I undertook, the destruction of the wicked Muhammadans, the amassing of great wealth, and the building of difficult forts, I have achieved success, thanks to your blessing. When I

¹ *Patre*, Letter 26.

offered my whole kingdom to you, saying that I desired to serve you, I was told that my best service would be to fulfil the regular kingly duties. My next request was that Rāma's temple might be established near by, so that we might have frequent visits together and in order that the Rāmdāsī sect might spread in all directions. You, most revered one, thereupon came to reside in mountain caves near me, and established the temple of Rāma at Chāphaḷ, with the result that the Sampradāya (sect) and the disciples have been successfully spreading their influence. My next request was that certain pieces of land should be given toward the worship of Śrī Rāma and help to meet the expenses of the festivities, the feeding of Brahmans and guests, the construction of buildings at Chāphaḷ, and also toward the expenses of worship and festivities at places where additional idols have been established. You informed me that I should not worry upon that score, but should give whatever seemed suitable, and should work for the spread of the sect, the kingdom and the race. These were my instructions. As a result, the Sampradāya and the idols of Rāma have been established in different localities, and instructions concerning the land grants have been duly sent. Near Rāma's temple at Chāphaḷ, of 121 villages, each was to give eleven *bigḥas* of land toward this expense,' etc.

Then follow detailed instructions about land grants.

In commenting upon this letter, Mr. Dev notes eleven points that are brought out.¹

(a) Rāmdās favoured Śivājī with a mantra and encouraged him in his work of establishing a kingdom, spreading the new religion, serving God and Brahmans, and removing distress.

(b) Śivājī's success was helped by the blessing of Rāmdās.

(c) Śivājī offered his kingdom to Rāmdās.

(d) Rāmdās told the king to live up to his religious duties.

(e) Śivājī desired a centre from which the movement might spread.

¹ *Don Charitṛe*, see Introduction.

(f) Rāmdās founded a temple of Rāma at Chāphal as Śivājī wished.

(g) Śivājī asked what he might do toward the support of Rāmdāsī activities.

(h) Rāmdās told Śivājī that he need not worry about this matter.

(i) The sect spread rapidly and Śivājī contributed toward its support.

(j) Rāmdās granted Śivājī permission to contribute as he desired.

(k) Upon the tenth of Āśvina, bright half, śaka 1600 (1678), Śivājī gave a large gift to Rāmdās, which was listed in the letter.

This letter bears the stamp of Śivājī, and gives every evidence of being genuine; and, therefore, as Mr. Dev points out, it is important testimony of the influence which Rāmdās exerted over Śivājī during the major part of his career.

II. *The Argument for a Later Date.*

1. Mr. G. K. Chandorkar published in the Marāṭhī weekly, *Kesari*, on June 26, 1906, a group of letters which were in the possession of the descendants of Divākar Gosāvi, the disciple of Rāmdās, and the one who was present when Śivājī and Rāmdās first met, according to the familiar story. One letter, from Keshav to Divākar, says: 'I understand what you write, namely, that the Rājā Śivājī Bhonsle is coming to visit the Samartha.¹ It is his first visit. . . . I understand what you write about there being nobody to make arrangements. Engage the people of the Vāḍī (Śingavāḍī) to make arrangements.' (Date, April 4, 1672.) Another letter from Śivājī to Jijoḷī Kātkar, the chief official at Sajjaṅgaḷ, says, 'Śrī Rāmdās Gosāvi, residing at Śivthar, will come for a few days to the fort, and you shall permit him to arrive there, to stay as long as he pleases and to leave when he pleases.' (Dated 1676.)

2. A letter has been found written by Bhāskar to

¹ Keluskar, p. 536.

Divākar (both disciples), which may be translated as follows : 'We went to beg for alms at the residence of the Rājā Śivājī and he asked us, "Who and whence are you ?" Upon which we replied that we were the disciples of Śrī Samārtha Rāmdās, and lived at Chāphaḷ. He asked where Rāmdās lived and where he originally came from. We told him that he was originally a resident of Jāmb on the banks of the Gaṅgā (Godāvarī) and that at present he had established a hermitage at Chāphaḷ, together with a temple of Rāma ; and having instituted solemn worship and celebrations there, had bidden us all go forth for alms for the performance of the solemn rites ; wherefore we were thus rambling about. On our saying this, the Rājā wrote a letter to Dattājī Vakenis to grant an annual sum of 200 pagodas for the celebration of the temple solemnities. The money will reach there in time. Thus be this known.' (February 13, 1659.)¹

3. The tradition is that Śivājī had a desire to meet Rāmdās for some time, before he was successful in his attempt, and this is borne out by the letter which Rāmdās sent to Śivājī and which may be translated as follows : 'O mountain of resolution !² O helper of many, of unchanged resolve, rich and master of your passions ! O thou who pourest benefits on others ; whose qualities are incomparable ! Lord of men, horses and elephants ! Lord of forts, earth and ocean ! Leader and king, who art always strong ! King, triumphant and famous, powerful and generous, meritorious, virtuous and wise ! Possessed ever of conduct and judgment, generosity and faith, knowledge and character ; bold and generous, grave and daring, swift to execute ; thou who by thy vigilance didst spurn kings ! The holy places were broken and the abodes of Brahmans were polluted. All earth was shaken and religion had fled. Nārāyaṇ resolved to protect the gods, the faith, the cows, the Brahmans, and inspired thee to do so. Near thee are many wise paṇḍits, great poets, men skilled in sacrifice, and learned in the

¹ Keluskar, p. 537.

² Merū is the fabled mountain at the centre of the earth.

bakhar refers to him only twice, stating in one place that Rāmdās gave advice to Śivājī after the latter's coronation in 1674. In the *Śivadigvijaya* bakhar there is a reference to Rāmdās, saying that the king sought the Svāmī's comfort because of his domestic troubles.¹ It is not until the *Chitnis* bakhar, written 183 years after Śivājī's birth, that Rāmdās comes to occupy an important place in the secular history of the period. This bakhar states that Śivājī visited the Svāmī before starting for Delhi, and also relates how the king expressed the desire to live with Rāmdās because of his disappointment over his son Sambhājī's conduct.² The argument here is that these later bakhars must have taken the date 1649 from the traditional biographies of Rāmdās, and that the silence of the earlier bakhars is very significant.

(b) The Satāra and Parāli forts were not captured from Bijāpur by Śivājī until 1673, therefore Rāmdās could not have gone there till then.³

(c) In his letter to Śivājī, Rāmdās called him, 'Lord of water.' Since Śivājī did not build a navy or conquer the coast territory (Konkan) till 1663, this term did not have historical meaning until that date.

(d) In Tukārām's message, he used the words *Chhatrapati* and *Aṣṭapradhān*, referring to his sovereignty and to his eight ministers. Since Śivājī had not assumed such rank during Tukārām's life, this reference must be an interpolation. In his *Life and Teaching of Tukārām*, page 124, Mr. Edwards gives the arguments for and against this criticism; but he personally does not accept the above conclusion.

(e) All the documents known to us concerning land grants refer to grants made after 1674, and none refer to grants made before that date. This, of course, is an 'argument from silence.'

(f) There are records which conclusively indicate that Rāmdās went to live at Sajjaṅgaḍ in 1676, as the above letter has shown.

(g) While admitting that the teachings of the poet-saints

¹ Sen, p. 247.

² Sen, p. 238.

³ *H.M.P.*, p. 241.

as a group were helpful to Śivājī in establishing his kingdom, the teaching of Rāmdās was not distinctive or different from the others.¹

(h) In support of the above statement, these scholars point out that the first seven chapters of the *Dāsbodh* say practically nothing about political activities or duties to the state. Hence Rāmdās did not stress this phase until influenced by Śivājī's achievements. In other words, it was Śivājī who influenced Rāmdās, rather than *vice versa*.

(i) These scholars maintain that the tradition which says that Śivājī consulted Rāmdās after killing Āfzul Khān is entirely spurious.

(j) They admit that the gift of 200 pagodas for the Chāphaḷ religious ceremonies was historical; but since there is no further mention of it, it could not have been an annual affair.

(k) They also consider that Hanumant's references to Pratāpgaḍ, Māhulī, Wāī, and other places are unhistorical, because these came into Śivājī's possession after 1662.

(l) At the beginning of the fourth section of the sixth chapter of the *Dāsbodh* is the following verse: '4760 years of Kālī have passed.' Translated into our calendar, this date becomes A.D. 1659, and therefore must have been the date when this particular section of the *Dāsbodh* was written. But since the traditional account says that the sixth section of the thirteenth chapter was the advice given to Śivājī at the time of initiation, it may readily be seen what a discrepancy there is. If the sixth chapter was written in 1659, the thirteenth chapter could not have been written in 1649.

(m) Śivājī lived a very strenuous life between 1650 and 1670, conquering territory, making the journey to Delhi, and organizing his government; and even if Rāmdās had desired to be upon friendly terms, it would have been physically impossible for Śivājī to have given time for such a friendship.

(n) In the August number of *Vividhnyānvistār*, 1924, there is reference to a book published by Mr. S. M. Divākar

¹ Bhāte, p. 15.

concerning the capture of the Panhāḷa fort. The preface of this book states that Śivājī met Rāmdās at Polādpur while on the way from Raigaḍ to Panhāḷa. The verse in question (Chapter iv, verse 18) says, 'He fell at the Gosāvī's feet.' But of course, this may have referred to another Gosāvī.

III. Conclusions

It is remarkable that these two points of view, so diametrically opposed to each other, should both be based upon the testimony of contemporary witnesses, consisting of original letters. There are two questions involved:—the reliability of the documents, and the trustworthiness of the witnesses. Supporting the date of 1649 is the Diary of Antāji and also the poem of Bhīmasvāmī, both of whom were the Svāmī's contemporaries. It is interesting that the various letters and documents referred to are accepted as genuine by both sides of the argument; therefore, for the present, we may assume that the chief letters referred to are genuine and not spurious. It is possible that manuscript experts will later declare this or that document a forgery; but as far as we know to-day, they are original letters or genuine copies. Then to what extent can we depend upon the historical accuracy of their testimony? Here we are faced with a greater degree of uncertainty. The Diary of Antāji, for example, contains legendary material, such as the visit to Eknāth or the account of Uddhav's kīrtan. While the poem of Bhīmasvāmī is restrained in its statements, the biography by the same author (Bhīmasvāmī Śahāpurkar) relates a number of imaginary incidents, such as the dinner at which Śrī Rāma was present. Hence it is clear that, while these authors were contemporaries of the Svāmī and doubtless had honest motives, they lacked historical judgment and were unable to distinguish between the historical and the legendary. Without attempting to misrepresent facts, they wrote what they believed, facts and fancy being interwoven together.

The reference of Tukārām to Rāmdās is a disputed point; and, therefore, we need not enlarge upon it. Divā-

kar's account of the meeting between Śivājī and Rāmdās at Raigaḍ has the appearance of being genuine, but does not settle the problem of the date. Nor is the 'code message' of Kalyāṇ decisive evidence, because we lack certainty about the authorship. The references by Giridhar are ambiguous and may have two interpretations. Śivājī's letter to the Svāmī definitely establishes the fact that the king was a devoted disciple, and generously supported the Rāmdāsī movement; but again, as evidence for the date, it is not conclusive. It follows the usual custom of using extravagant language and the references are more or less general. Hence, while it is possible to dismiss many of these documents supporting the early date as unreliable, we must admit that we have here a strong tradition, not easily shaken. Those writers who knew Rāmdās and had lived with him testify to the fact that the Svāmī was Śivājī's guru through a large part of the king's public life. They had every reason to know, and did not hesitate about this general statement. Their testimony has been followed by later political writers, by the authors of recent lives of Rāmdās, by English historians, and by many modern Marāṭhī scholars.

Exponents of the late date base their conclusions chiefly upon three documents, namely, the letter telling of the first visit, the letter telling of Śivājī's inquiry about Rāmdās, and the Svāmī's letter to the king, stating that the latter had ignored him. In the absence of contradictory evidence, we may assume that these also are genuine documents, although Mr. Dev points out that the handwriting of Keshav's letter concerning the 'first visit' is different from three other bits of Keshav's writing now in Mr. Dev's possession.¹ The word 'first' in Keshav's letter is, however, by no means conclusive. It may be used in an official or political sense, and the king may have visited Śiṅganvāḍī a number of times. In the same way, the term 'Lord of water' may refer to a navy, or it may be poetic exaggeration, referring to the king's ascendancy over the whole territory, including lakes and rivers. The fact

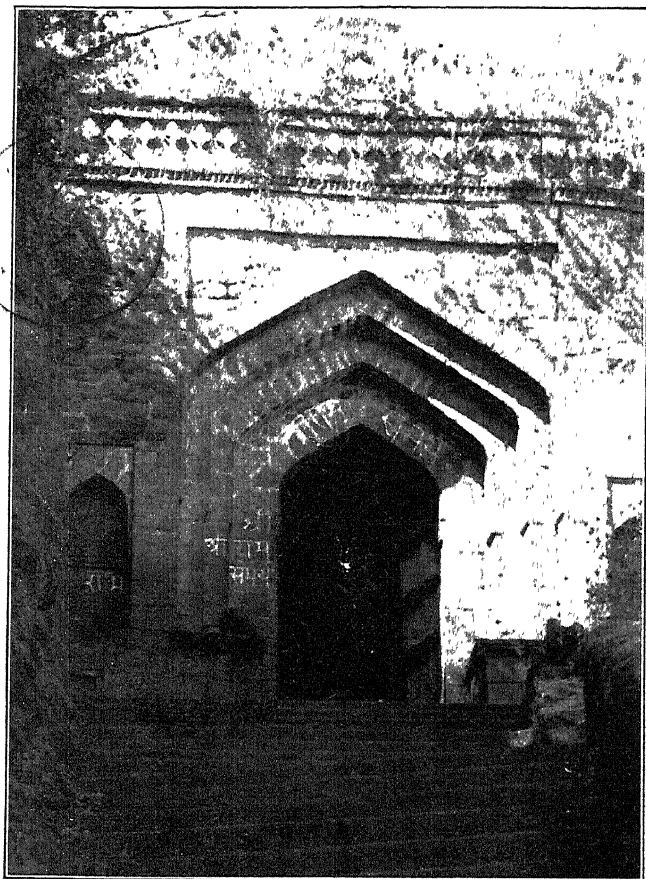
¹ *Don Charitre*, see Introduction.

that the *Sabhāsad* bakhar makes no mention of the Svāmī is also weighty evidence; but it is not conclusive, and the argument from silence can be pressed too far. (In spite of the large salt deposits of the Punjab, the *Rig Veda* does not mention salt; yet it would be unwarrantable to assume that therefore the early Aryans were unfamiliar with the use or the value of salt.) Bhāskar's letter, of the three, is the most convincing evidence against the early date, although even this letter does not preclude the possibility of friendship between Śivājī and the Svāmī before the conversation took place. Śivājī *may* have feigned ignorance, but this is very unlikely; and the letter stands as impressive evidence against 1649 as the date of meeting.

Then what conclusions can we draw? It is a case of seeking the assured historical events and then drawing logical inferences. We know that Śivājī captured the Satāra and Paraḷī forts in 1673, and hence he could not have installed Rāmdās at Sajjaṅgaḍ before that date; thus contradicting the testimony of the Diary that he did so in 1650. There is every reason for believing that the sixth chapter of the *Dāsbodh* was written in 1659, because of the Hindu date written therein; and since all of the *Dāsbodh* up to this section had been mainly concerned with spiritual topics, it is safe to assume that Rāmdās had not been actively interested in political events before 1659, at least to the point of writing about them. The silence of the earlier records concerning the Svāmī gives way, in the later works, to a wealth of traditions; and this is a suspicious process, particularly when reinforced by the silence of the first part of the *Dāsbodh* concerning politics. The letter of Bhāskar clearly indicates that Śivājī knew little or nothing of the Svāmī before 1659.

From the foregoing argument, the writer has reached the following conclusions:

First, the original meeting between Rāmdās and Śivājī took place, in all probability, after 1659. The exact date, however, remains uncertain, in the writer's judgment; and it is quite possible that they met before 1672, granting, of course, that there was an important public meeting in that year, as the letter shows. As brought out in that



By courtesy of Mr. Murathe

Photographer, Satara.

THE ENTRANCE TO PARALĪ FORT (SAJJANGAD), WHERE RĀMDAS
RESIDED FOR SOME TIME AND DIED

Note the inscriptions 'Śrī Rām Samartha' ('Śrī Rām the Mighty')
over and around the gate.

letter, Śivājī gave 200 gold coins to the Svāmī in 1659. During the years 1654-64, Rāmdās had his headquarters at Śivthar, which was only a few miles from Raigaḍ, which Śivājī often visited. It is possible that the two may have met or have corresponded during these years of geographical proximity; and it is also reasonable to assume that the two knew a good deal about each other before the actual initiation took place. Yet, though the evidence for the 1672 date is weighty, the writer is not entirely convinced that the matter is definitely settled. If the testimony of the disciples is to be taken at its face value, the weight of the evidence is that they first met before 1672, and for the present there does not seem to be sufficient historical evidence to decide the matter one way or the other. The disciples themselves contradict each other, and the case for the later date rests so much upon the argument from silence, that it is not safe to reach final conclusions, pending further evidence.

Second, it is also clear, from an examination of all the documents, that the friendship between Śivājī and Rāmdās was more in evidence during the later years. After his coronation the king's mind ran more in religious channels, and he came to value highly the shrewd wisdom of his chosen preceptor. The land grants and the government financial aid increased as the years passed. The increased leisure of the king, with the more settled life of the Svāmī, opened the way for the ripening of this friendship at Sajjaṅgaḍ, and the letters which we possess to-day were written during these last years. The two had much in common, each admiring the other's qualities, and during the last year or two of the king's life, he counted a great deal upon the Svāmī's spiritual guidance.

Third, the influence of Rāmdās over Śivājī was primarily spiritual, and only secondarily political. From the evidence at hand, it seems clear that Rāmdās was not an important factor in Śivājī's political career; and, therefore, to make such a claim is not only unsupported by the historical evidence, but it is also unfair to Śivājī and the Svāmī. The Saint was supreme in the field of religion, and history must acknowledge his supremacy in that sphere

which he knew so well and filled so acceptably. To make him primarily a political teacher and secondly a religious teacher is to give the wrong emphasis, putting him in a category where he does not belong. It is true that, as time passed, his interest in affairs of state increased, doubtless stimulated by his admiration for Śivājī. The latter part of the *Dāśbodh* contains much sound advice along political and social lines. Śivājī often sought the Svāmī's advice upon matters of state during his later years, and came to have a high regard for the Saint's wise, shrewd, intelligent observations. In this respect, the teaching of Rāmdās *does* differ from that of Tukārām and the other bhaktas; yet, with all his emphasis upon the practical, Rāmdās remained to the end of his life pre-eminently a spiritual teacher.

THE SVĀMĪ'S CLOSING YEARS

In many ways the final years of Rāmdās were a comfort and a joy. Surrounded by friends, his material wants supplied by a king who was a grateful disciple, with the knowledge that his spiritual movement had spread until it was a powerful factor in the religious life of Mahārāshṭra, Rāmdās had much to be thankful for. The Sajjaṅgaḷ arrangements were well organized, each disciple having a specified task, and all working together for the common welfare. The Purāṇa service was entrusted to Vāsudev Gosāvī; Musalrām's task was announcing and arranging for visitors; Dattātraya Svāmī had the supervision of the granary; Ākkābāi had charge of the kitchen; and Anant Gosāvī had the management of the kīrtans. To Kṛishṇa was given the task of lamp-lighting, while Divākar was in charge of the idol worship. Many pilgrims visited the fort, Śivājī himself being a frequent guest, and during special occasions, such as the Rāmanavamī, as many as 5,000 people gathered upon the top of the hill.

In another sense, the final days of the aged Saint were sad, because of the departure, one by one, of those whom he loved. His devoted brother, Śreshṭh, who was a poet in his own right, died on the thirteenth of the dark half of

Phālguna, śaka 1599 (A.D. 1677), his wife, Parbatī, dying two days later. In 1678 the two sons of Śreshṭh, Rāmji and Śāmji, were brought from Jāmb to visit the Svāmī, living with him for a year and then returning home. Venābāī, the faithful female disciple, and the only woman allowed to give kīrtans, passed away upon the ninth of the dark half of Āshāḍha, śaka 1600 (A.D. 1678). The Diary tells how on the ninth of the bright half of Pausa, śaka 1601 (1679), Śivāji visited the Saint; and in the course of the conversation Rāmdās mentioned that his end was drawing near. Taking leave of the Svāmī, Śivāji journeyed to Raigaḍ, where his death came very suddenly, due to exhaustion from a military venture. Taken sick with fever and pains, he grew rapidly worse, although everything was done for him. Realizing that his end was near, he summoned his ministers and gave them his final messages. After performing the last rites of religion, he passed away, April 5, 1680. His death was a great shock to Rāmdās, who seemed to lose all interest in life. There is a letter, written in 1680 by Antāji Gopāl, containing certain instructions issued by the Svāmī and showing how deeply the latter grieved for the king.¹ It refers to the fact that Divākar had been sent to Raigaḍ after Śivāji's death, returning later with Rāgho Bhaṭ, who requested the Svāmī to attend Sambhāji's coronation, and it describes the long lonely hours which Rāmdās spent, mourning for the king. He also was pained by Sambhāji's excesses, as has been narrated previously.

The poem by Bhīmasvāmī Śahāpurkar gives the details of the death of Rāmdās.² The latter had only lived in the new house at Sajjaṅgaḍ, built by Śivāji, for about ten months, when he announced that his end was drawing near. He stopped going out and spoke but little, one request being that idols should be installed on the north side of the maṭh. Kalyāṇ arrived there from his maṭh at Ḍomgāon, and spent a few days with his guru, later returning to his adopted village. Rāmdās lay upon a couch which Śivāji had presented to him, occasionally drinking milk but

• ¹ *Patre*, Letter 42.

² *V.V.*, Vol. I., sec. 25.

otherwise eating nothing. It was the desire of his disciples that he should go to Chāphal, because the Paraḷī climate did not seem to agree with him; but he declined to do so, and the disciples acquiesced in his wishes, Ākkābāi and Uddhav being especially faithful in their ministrations. As he kept growing weaker, the disciples finally urged him to make arrangements about the management of the chief maths. Accordingly, he told them that the sons of his deceased brother should be brought from Jāmb and the estate entrusted to their care, all the disciples being subject to their orders.¹ Thereupon Ākkābāi requested three disciples to go to Jāmb, so as to comply with this request; but, according to Hanumant, no one went. When the Svāmī asked a week later why no one had come, they avoided giving him a direct answer. In spite of his growing feebleness, Rāmdās had kept up his interest in the State, had sent Divākar to Sambhājī's coronation as his personal representative, and had sent a letter of remonstrance to the young king because of his vicious life, which, however, seemed to have little effect.

On the fifth of the dark half of Māgha, four images which had been prepared by Raghunāth Nārāyaṇ Hanumant, at the request of Rāmdās, were brought by Malhār Nimbdev. At midnight, the following night, the latter removed the wax from the eyes of the idols and the images were set up in the room where he slept. Four days later, the Svāmī arose early in the morning, put on his sandals, and sat with his face toward the north, after prostrating himself before the image and making his prayer. At the request of Jijoḷī Kātkar, he drank a cup of sugar-water which Ākkābāi had prepared, the latter and Uddhav being the only disciples in the room. The last words of advice were that Ākkābāi and the others should read the *Dāsboḍh*, which was equivalent to talking with himself. While the two disciples were standing near him, Rāmdās suddenly uttered the words 'Har, Har!' and the name 'Rāma' three times, looked toward the face of the image, and died. The disciples immediately went about their

¹ Hanumant, ch. xviii, p. 431, l. 7.

separate tasks, preparing for the funeral ceremonies. Rāmchandrapant arrived with money which Sambhājī had sent for this purpose, and the Svāmī's body was burned, with *tulsī* sticks, according to the tradition; Uddhav Gosāvi performing the funeral rites. A tomb was built where his body was burned, and his sandals were later placed upon it. A few days later, Sambhājī came to Sajjaṅgaḍ, and when he saw the small tomb, he ordered a temple to be built upon it at his own expense. The ashes of Rāmdās were later dug up and taken to Benares.

CHAPTER IV

BIOGRAPHICAL LEGENDS

BIRTH STORIES

IN the Domgāon maṭh a poem has been found which possibly was written by Jagannāth Mahārāj, a disciple of Kalyāṇ, and in which the birth story of Rāmdās is narrated.¹ According to Mr. Dev, this story brings out nine chief points: (1) Sūryājīpant and Rāṇūbāī performed penance, so as to be blessed by the birth of a son. (2) In a dream the god Rāma came to them and presented them with the idols of the members of his family, and two cocoanuts. (3) At Jāmbgāon they put up these images. (4) The name of the first son born to them was Rāma (possibly Rāmī Rāmdās comes from that). Other records state that the elder brother's name was Gaṅgādhara. (5) Rāmdās was born the same day that the god Rāma was born. (6) Gaṅgādhara or Śreshṭh was favoured with a mantra by his father. (7) Nārāyaṇ was displeased because he had received no mantra, and therefore went to Pañchvaṭī. (8) Nārāyaṇ performed penance for twelve years, standing in a pool of water in the 'Ganges' (Godāvarī). (9) When the penance was over, Rāmdās had a vision of Rāma and then knew what his mission was to be.

The story is told differently by Mahīpati, who says that Sūryājīpant worshipped the sun and spent twelve years in prostrating himself before the sun and muttering the name of the sun god. The sun was so pleased that he appeared before Sūryājīpant in person, saying, 'I am pleased with you and will give you what you wish'; whereupon the worshipper asked for children. The sun gladly granted

¹ *V.V.*, Vol. II, sec. 47.

this request, saying that two sons would be born to them, one to be an incarnation of himself, and the other to be an incarnation of Māruti and a world-saviour. When the younger son was born, there were twelve days of festivities, and the child's face shone with joy. At five months he sat up, and at two years he both walked and spoke. At five years of age he went to school for a year, after which he studied the *Veda* with the family priest. Once, when rebuked by his mother for his pranks, the lad said, 'My family is the whole universe!' One day he took a bucket of grain belonging to some farmers and carried it to his home. The farmers followed him and he returned it to them, multiplied many times. Both Mahipati and Giridhar assert that Nārāyaṇ as a boy showed the qualities of Māruti and even had a tail. He was so strong that he played with wrestlers, using round stones weighing two pounds each, and so intelligent that he learned how to keep accounts in eleven days.

THE VISION OF RĀMA

In *Svānubhava Dīnkar*, written by the disciple Dīnkar, there is a detailed description of the vision in which Rāma appeared to Rāmdās.¹ He is said to have appeared a number of times, but this particular appearance was when Rāmdās was eleven years old. One day when the father had gone away to take his bath, and the lad was at home, a monkey came to him disguised as a servant, and brought him to a man and a woman dressed as Kshatriyas, sitting in a palanquin and surrounded by many attendants. After asking the boy where his father was, the man in the palanquin asked him to draw near, presenting him with a letter, upon which was the seal of Śrī Rāma. The boy became terrified and stood trembling, silent, gazing at the group. He alternately wept and cried for joy, marvelling at the group before him, for there he saw a beautiful form, with Sītā sitting at the left and the brothers Lakshmaṇ and Bhārat behind, Hanuman standing in front. Putting his

¹ *Svānubhava Dīnkar*, ch. xvi, sec. 4.

hand upon Nārāyaṇ's head, Śrī Rāma taught him the great words, *Tat tvam asi*,¹ committing him to the care of Māruti. Rāma also presented the lad with a cloth of red ochre colour, shining like lightning, which would prevent colds, and an arrow. After this vision, the place was plunged in darkness and the gods disappeared. In the meantime, when the father and brother returned home, they became terrified because of the report that Nārāyaṇ had gone off with a monkey. Starting out to seek for him, they found him in a neighbouring forest, dazed and unable to speak. After they saw Śrī Rāma's seal upon the letter in Nārāyaṇ's hand, their minds were at peace, because they realized that the god had appeared to the boy; and the lad himself observed a year of silence.

A FRIEND OF ANIMALS

There are a number of legends which describe the freedom with which Rāmdās mingled among wild animals. He once went to a small village, a disciple going on ahead and warning the tigers to keep away because the Svāmī was coming. Whereupon the tigers obligingly left and, out of respect to the Svāmī, they have never returned to that place from that day to this. At another time he left strict instructions that under no consideration was he to be disturbed; but a group of people, disobeying this injunction, sought him out and found him sitting upon a lion. Again, when a tiger became too familiar with him, he caught it by the ears and rendered it helpless. Although the animals feared the Svāmī, they realized that he was their friend and were always glad to help him in time of need.

RĀMDĀS AND ŚIVĀJĪ

In the household of Bāpurāo Upādhye, a song was heard which was composed by a woman named Gurubāi.² It is reputed to be a very old song and tells how, when

¹ *Tat tvam asi* is the great Advaita formula, meaning, *Thou art that*.

² *V.V.*, Vol. II, sec. 65.

Rāmdās was sick, he asked for some tiger's milk, but no one was willing to undertake the task of getting it. When Śivāji heard of it, he came to Chāphaḷ, and going out into the jungle, he found a female tiger. When he asked for some of her milk, she became very friendly, licked his hand and allowed him to milk her ; after which he brought the milk to the Svāmī, who gratefully drank it.

A mischief-making Brahman once told the king that the Svāmī had wrong relations with women, and therefore Śivāji went to Sajjaṅgaḍ to investigate the matter. The Brahman said that he saw two women with Rāmdās by looking through a hole in the wall, but when Śivāji looked, instead of the two women, he saw two monkeys with the Svāmī. Becoming very angry, Śivāji prepared to punish the Brahman until dissuaded by the Saint, and this hole is still pointed out to curious visitors at Sajjaṅgaḍ. At another time Venābāi looked through a hole at Rāmdās while he was eating and saw a monkey eating with him, and she heard the words, 'Rām, Rām,' spoken. When the monkey realized that she was looking through the hole, it roared at her and she fainted.¹

Another story narrates how Śivāji was once hunting in the forest, but failed to find any game until, to his astonishment, he discovered that all the animals were with Rāmdās.² He expressed the desire to stay and serve the Svāmī, provided the animals would not injure him. That evening, as Śivāji's clerk sat by the river bank, he saw leaves floating in the water with abhaṅgs written upon them, and after obtaining some of them he took them to the king. Greatly taken with the sentiment upon the leaves, the latter sought for the author, believing that he would prove to be an ideal guru. Each day he returned to the same place and secured more of the leaves as they came floating down the river, until, finally, he saw Rāmdās in the forest worshipping Mārutī, after which Mārutī disappeared. As Śivāji stood weeping, Rāmdās instructed him to draw near ; whereupon the king came forward

¹ Narrated by Bhīmasvāmī Śīrgāvkar, p. 35, abhaṅg 73 (*Don Charitre*). ² Mahīpati, ch. iv, p. 36, v. 29.

and fell prostrate before the holy man. Much to Śivāji's dismay, Rāmdās told him that his duty consisted in looking after the interests of his subjects, and that he should no longer neglect the kingdom or seek to become a religious devotee.

RAISING PEOPLE FROM THE DEAD

A number of such miracles are attributed to the Svāmī. Once when he came to a village he found that the pāṭel¹ had died and his widow was preparing to perform *satī*.² Restoring the man to life, the Svāmī passed on; but the widow, out of gratitude to him, decided to fast until she saw him again. Her desire was not fulfilled for about a month; after which both she and her husband became disciples.³ On another occasion when Śivāji was present, the Svāmī asked Bholarām to prepare and bring the pān supārī.⁴ Unfortunately, Bholarām was the victim of a plot laid by some of the disciples, who were jealous of him and had concealed the mortar, in which Bholarām used to prepare the betel-nut leaves, because Rāmdās had poor teeth and was not able to chew them properly. Finally, in desperation, Bholarām chewed it himself, after which he presented it to Rāmdās who was highly pleased with it. When the Svāmī heard of the plot, he decided to give his disciple an object lesson and again called for the mortar. Unable to comply with the request, Bholarām took a knife in his right hand and cut off his head. From the neck came the words, 'Here is the pān supārī and the mortar also.' When Śivāji took the head to the Svāmī, the latter took the preparation from the mouth of the dead, eating it with great enjoyment, and then, instructing Śivāji to put the head back on the body, the following words were heard, 'Turned aside a little, thus is God's desire!'—and Bholarām was himself again.

¹ The chief official in the village.

² Committing suicide by being burned alive on her husband's funeral pyre.

³ Narrated by Bhīmasvāmī Śīrgāvkar, p. 4, abhaṅg 7-8 (*Don Charitre*).

⁴ Hanumant, ch. x, p. 188.

RĀMDĀS AT PAṆḌHARPŪR

One day Rāmdās was seated by the bank of the Kṛishṇa river when a group of Varkaris¹ passed by on their way to Paṇḍharpūr. When they requested the Svāmī to accompany them, he declined, saying that Śrī Rāma was the only God whom he knew.² Viṭhobā felt grieved that Rāmdās was unwilling to go to Paṇḍharpūr; and, therefore, disguised as a Brahman, he himself came to the bank of the Kṛishṇa river, where he explained to the Svāmī that there was no real difference between Kṛishṇa and Rāma, both being the one true God. Hearing this, Rāmdās volunteered to go along with the Brahman, journeying with him until they reached the sacred city, where the Svāmī bowed to the idol of Mārutī, which inquired the reason for his visit there. The latter replied that Rāma and Kṛishṇa were the same and that he was there at the advice of Śrī Rāma, whereupon the Svāmī expressed the desire to see Viṭhobā in the form of Rāma. When the image was seen to be changed in appearance, all those present were astonished, and learning that it was Rāmdās who had changed the form of their Viṭhobā, they fell prostrate before him, beseeching him to restore their idol to them, which he graciously consented to do.

LIVING UNDER WATER

The Svāmī once spent the night in a temple of Śiva near the Kṛishṇa river, where Rāma appeared to him in a dream, telling him to rescue an ancient idol which lay in a neighbouring pool.³ The next day Rāmdās plunged into the river and remained three days, coming out at midnight of the third day, and bringing the idol of Rāma to Chāphal, where he established it. The people in the vicinity were disappointed to think that the idol had been taken to Chāphal, but were appeased when Rāmdās presented them with a banner and a pole. Once a man went to the saint for spiritual instruction, and was told to read the

¹ Those who worship Viṭhobā, the idol at Paṇḍharpūr.

² Hanumant, ch. ix, pp. 155-56.

³ Bhīmasvāmī Śīrgāvkar, p. 12, abhaṅg 24 (*Don Charitre*).

Dāsboḍh.¹ As the two walked through the woods together, they stopped near a well and the inquirer, after climbing a tree, accidentally fell into the well. When he reached the bottom of the well, he saw Rāmdās sitting in his maṭh, teaching a disciple. On being pulled out, he narrated this to Rāmdās. Another story tells how Jairām and Rāmdās together went to the bottom of a well and sat in meditation, the latter coming out three days later to go to Chāphaḷ.² When asked where Jairām was, he remembered that he was still in the water. Consequently, he returned to the well and brought Jairām out by the help of a wooden cradle.

BODILY TRANSFORMATIONS

One day Rāmdās and Jairām were walking in the jungle, when the former announced his determination to dig a hole for a residence.³ They proceeded to dig, after Jairām had brought the necessary tools, when suddenly a landslide of earth completely covered Rāmdās, who disappeared from view. Unable to rescue his master, Jairām returned to Śahāpur, weeping as he walked ; but his sorrow turned into joy and astonishment when he found Rāmdās in Śahāpur. In one passage it is stated that Rāmdās took the form of the wind,⁴ and in another reference it is stated that, when in the form of Mārutī, he was seen by some Muhammadans who fainted from fear.⁵

RAISING ANIMALS FROM THE DEAD

Rāmdās was able to restore animals to life, as, for example, when he brought back the horse of Raṅganāth Svāmī. One day, while walking along with a sling in his hand, he hit a leaf which a disciple held up in front of him.⁶

¹ Mahīpati, ch. xii, v. 57.

² Bhīmasvāmī Sirgāvkār, p. 26, abhaṅg 53 (*Don Charitre*).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 25, abhaṅg 52 (*Don Charitre*).

⁴ *Pratāp*, ch. xix, p. 118, v. 22. ⁵ *Ibid.*, ch. xix, p. 123, v. 75.

⁶ Mahīpati, ch. vi, p. 67, vs. 181-83.

The disciple held up another leaf, behind which was a bird ; and, when Rāmdās hit the leaf, the bird was accidentally killed, causing a great *furore* among the Brahmans, who pōinted the finger of accusation against the Svāmī. Wrapping the bird up in a piece of cloth, Rāmdās brought it to the critical Brahmans and asked them to restore it to life. When they admitted their inability to do this, he poured a little water upon the bird from the Kṛishṇa river, with the result that it came to life, settled on his shoulder and then flew away. Hanumant tells of a Brahman's cow at Māhulī which was so wild that it had to be kept tied to a post.¹ One day the man's wife took the cow to the river for water, but it broke away and ran into the forest. Although she ran after it as fast as she could, she was unable to catch it, the cow finally jumping over a cliff to the river bank below, where it was instantly killed. Rāmdās, who sat near-by, heard the woman's weeping and told Kalyāṇ to go over and milk the cow. After reaching the cow, Kalyāṇ told it to rise, and the cow immediately got up. When the milking was finished, the cow walked over to the Svāmī, who told the woman to take it home.

INTELLECTUAL MIRACLES

There are a number of legends telling of the wonderful mental feats by both Rāmdās and his disciples. He is said to have written the entire *Dāśbodh* in twenty-four hours, and also to have written the *Rāmāyaṇa* sections in one night.² Even Kalyāṇ was able to make a complete copy of the *Dāśbodh* in a single night. Hanumant tells of the Sanskrit scholar, Sadāśiv Yevālkar, who came to Śivājī's court in the hope of acquiring prestige.³ When Gaṅgā Paṇḍit declined to cross swords with the visitor, the lot fell upon Rāmdās, who happened to be at Chāphaḷ. Therefore Sadāśiv and Gaṅgā set out to find him. After their formal meeting, the Svāmī said that he was neither a scholar nor

¹ Hanumant, ch. xiv, pp. 338-40.

² Bhīmasvāmī Śirgāvkār, p. 59, abhaṅg 119 (*Don Charitre*).

³ Hanumant, ch. xiii, pp. 296-99.

a student of the *Purāṇas*, and so was unqualified to answer the questions. Sadāśiv insisted, however, whereupon Rāmdās called to a passing wood-seller, who happened to be a Mahār.¹ The latter answered, at the request of Rāmdās, all the pandit's questions, much to the latter's shame and humiliation, the pandit finally prostrating himself before the Svāmī and asking for his pardon. Mahīpati tells of a barber who became a Rāmdāsī,² and who became so learned that he was able even to teach Brahmans, being buried like a sannyāsī³ when he died.

THE SVĀMĪ'S INTIMACY WITH GODS

There are numerous references which tell of Rāmdās fraternizing with both Mārutī and Rāma. Since Rāmdās was supposed to be an incarnation of Mārutī, it is not surprising that many incidents are told in which the two are together, such as the pilgrimage to the Himālaya mountains, when the god presented Rāmdās with a helmet, cloak, red garments, amulet, sandals and *kuṇḍī* (sword-stick).⁴ During one of the Svāmī's visits to his mother, she requested him to show her Śrī Rāma. Rāmdās asked Rāma to grant his mother's request; and, as an answer to his prayer, Rāma, accompanied by Sītā, Lakshman and Mārutī, appeared before his mother in bodily form.⁵ It is said that Rāmdās dined with Rāma and Sītā upon several occasions, and also with Mārutī alone.

MIRACULOUS POWER OF THE DISCIPLES

An interesting incident is told about Jairām Svāmī, who was first a devotee of Viṭhobā.⁶ The latter god appeared to him in a dream, telling him to go to Vadgāon, where he

¹ One of the outcaste groups.

² Mahīpati, ch. xxi, p. 256, v. 152.

³ A Hindu ascetic who has cast off all worldly possessions.

⁴ Hanumant, ch. ii, p. 39.

⁵ *Ibid.*, ch. iv, p. 56.

⁶ Bhīmasvāmī Śirgāvkār (*Don Charित्रe*), pp. 21, 23, abhaṅgs 43.47.

would find Kṛishṇappa, who would become his guru. The latter told him that, since his second wife was of low caste, he was not qualified to be his guru ; but that, nevertheless, he would give him a mantra. When Kṛishṇappa was dying, he sent Jairām to Rāmdās. Unfortunately, Jairām had been excommunicated by the Brahmans, because his former guru had not been a Brahman ; and they held a dinner party to which he was not invited. During the dinner, Jairām began to think about Rāmdās ; and the power of his thought was such that all the sacred threads of the Brahmans disappeared while they sat at dinner. As a result of this they became greatly ashamed of their attitude toward Jairām ; and, going to the Svāmī, they procured their sacred threads. Once when Rāmdās was the guest of Raṅganāth Svāmī, he found his host clad in fine apparel, with a bow and arrow in his hands, because it was the anniversary of a certain holy man.¹ Pointing to a lark flying in the sky, Rāmdās asked him to hit it, which he did, bringing it down with a single arrow. The Svāmī then rebuked him for killing the bird ; and immediately Raṅganāth ran his fingers over the dead bird, which came to life and flew away. The Svāmī took this occasion to remind Raṅganāth that he should dress and live as simply as possible, keeping in close touch with the people at all times.

CURING PHYSICAL AILMENTS

Hanumant tells the incident in which Rāmdās visited his mother and found her practically blind ; but, when he touched her eyes with his fingers, her sight was instantly restored. At another time, the Svāmī arose in the middle of the night, calling for pān supārī, and was disappointed when the disciples were unable to find any. Since he was unwilling to eat the nut fragments without the leaves, Kalyāṇ started out in the pitch dark to go to a neighbouring village, where he could procure some leaves ; but he had gone only a short distance when he stepped upon a black snake, which turned and bit him. Kalyāṇ fell down,

¹ Hanumant, ch. x, pp. 191-97 ; ch. xiv, p. 336.

calling out in a loud voice, 'Jai jai, Raghuvir Samartha!'¹ Rāmdās heard the cry from where he was sitting, and immediately ran out to where Kalyāṇ had fallen. Running his hand over Kalyāṇ's body from head to foot, he said, 'Kalyāṇ, arise!'; and the latter got up. He would have started out again, had not the Svāmī told him that the leaves were no longer necessary.

One day the Svāmī started out for Rāmeśvar, accompanied by Bhikāji, Ākkābāi and Venābāi; and they stopped at the village of Chikodī, where a Brahman named Ṭinnāji-pant Deshpande became a disciple.² After staying with him for five days, they resumed their journey, but, before leaving, they presented him with the five images of Rāma, Sītā, Lakshman, Bhārat and Śatrughna. A few days later, as the evening shadows fell, the Brahman was bitten by a snake just as he stepped out of the house. Going back into the house, and picking up a lute, he began to sing the abhaṅgs of Rāmdās. While he was singing, suddenly at midnight, all the five images became black, and his pain disappeared. When he saw that the five images had absorbed the poison which was in his body, causing them to change in colour, he vowed that he would not rise until they had resumed their original colour. He sat there, singing the abhaṅgs, until sunrise, when, to his great joy, he found that the idols had their normal colour.

BURNING A CITY

Once when Rāmdās was on his way to Sajjaṅgaḍ with a group of disciples, he came to a forest where he told the disciples to go to a neighbouring town and beg alms; he, Uddhav and Kalyāṇ remaining behind in a mango grove.³ As soon as the disciples started to enter the town, they were stopped by a police officer at the gate, who took away their begging sticks and wallets, telling them to leave immediately. In vain was the protest of the inhabitants of

¹ Victory to Śrī Rāma, the all-powerful one.

² Hanumant, ch. xi, p. 234.

³ *Ibid.*, ch. x, pp. 201-3.

the town, who told the official that these men were Rāmdāsīs; the man was obdurate. In the meantime, it was discovered that a monkey, with a torch in hand, was going from house to house and setting fire to the whole city. Whereupon all the inhabitants of the city, including the police official himself, went to the Svāmī, and, falling prostrate before him, asked for his forgiveness. This he gladly gave; and when the throng of people got back to the city, they found that the fire had been extinguished, the same monkey (Mārutī) now going about with a pot in hand, putting water upon it.

THE BRAHMANS AND THE COOKING POT

One day Rāmdās went to Mātāpur to see the idol Dattātraya, and while there he asked some Brahmins why they were performing penances, their reply being that they desired to see the god Dattātraya in person.¹ After a few days, Dattātraya appeared disguised as a holy man, together with his wife (māyā),² his three sons (the three properties),³ six goats (the six enemies, namely, passion, anger, greed, temptation, pride, jealousy), twenty-five chickens and a buffalo. When they entered the temple, the religious mendicant told his wife to prepare food, and she proceeded to make a fire, but when everything was ready, she asked what she was to put into the pot. At her husband's direction, she put in the chickens, then the goats, the three sons, the buffalo, and still it was not filled. The husband told her to cut up the Brahmins who were present, putting them into the pot; but they fled for their lives as soon as they heard it, Rāmdās, Uddhav and Kalyāṇ alone remaining. As the woman advanced with the knife, they told her to cut off their heads. In the twinkling of an eye, both woman and pot disappeared; in their place the god Dattātraya standing forth in all his glory. He said that the Brahmins were not true worshippers, but when the Svāmī besought him to have mercy upon them, he graciously yielded. After

¹ Hanumant, ch. x, pp. 209-12.

² Illusion, as taught by the Vedānta Philosophy.

³ The three component parts which compose the universe.

the Brahmans returned he told them that since there was no difference between himself and Rāmdās, they should worship the Svāmī at all times.

THE PERFECTION OF HIS CHARACTER

As in the case of many other Indian saints, the virtues of Rāmdās were so great, according to the stories, that they even aroused the jealousy of the gods. One story by Mahīpati is that the gods became actually afraid of him, and therefore decided to test him, sending a heavenly damsel, named Mohinī, down to earth.¹ To assist her she took the god of spring and of love along with her, but the Svāmī, intent upon his devotions, paid no attention to her, continuing to think only of Śrī Rāma. Finally, when he had rebuked her for her evil desire, she became ashamed and left him, the gods meanwhile showering him with flowers in testimony of his saintliness.

A WONDER WORKER

Numerous incidents describe his miraculous power to cope with any given situation. During his boyhood, the pātel at Jāmb had complained that the Brahmans, spending all their time in worship, had neglected hospitality and there was no suitable guest house (*dharmaśālā*) for visitors to stay in.² Therefore Nārāyaṇ took eight wrestlers to the forest that night, cut trees, built the walls, and by morning the house was ready to receive guests. Bhīmasvāmī Śīrgāvkār describes how Rāmdās once desired to give presents to a group of Brahmans on the bank of the Kṛishṇa river, and being without money he gave a small stone to each one. The faithful kept the stones until they reached home, where they found that each stone had turned into a golden coin. Hanumant tells an amusing story in which Rāmdās saved a ship from sinking.³ Śīvājī had gone to Chāphaḷ

¹ Mahīpati, ch. iii, p. 28, v. 46.

² *Pratāp*, ch. ii, p. 10, vs. 31-32.

³ Hanumant, ch. xiii, p. 304.

to present Rāmdās with some costly garments. While they were talking together the king noticed that the Svāmī's garments were wet, and to his astonishment, he discovered that they were wet with salt water. Asking him to note the date, Rāmdās expressed his confidence that fifteen days later everything would be made plain. After returning fifteen days hence, Śivājī found a merchant named Munje, from Rājāpur, with the Svāmī. His story was that his ship, laden with goods, was suddenly found to be sinking, and in desperation he prayed to Rāmdās that his ship, with all its passengers, might be saved. His prayer was answered and therefore he had arrived to present the Svāmī with one-fourth of his goods as a thank-offering.

A short incident, narrated by Giridhar, says that a proud disciple once saluted the Svāmī disrespectfully, using only one finger; and as a result his body was covered with boils.¹ When another worshipper brought false cocoanuts to Rāmdās, he was chagrined to find that they had been turned into cocks.² A number of times Rāmdās is said to have fed multitudes without any preparation. When a certain man brought false sugar and betel-nut leaves to the Svāmī, to his astonishment, the genuine articles appeared. As a warrior, Rāmdās proved his greatness by defeating an army of Muhammadans single-handed.³ Hanumant says that Rāmdās and Śivājī used to meet every Thursday; and once, when the king was thirsty, the Svāmī pushed a stone aside with his kuberḍī, and fresh water began to bubble up from the earth, Śivājī gratefully drinking his fill.⁴ In these and other ways, the Svāmī revealed his miraculous powers, which seemed capable, according to tradition, of dealing with almost any situation.

¹ *Pratāp*, ch. xii, p. 75, v. 22.

² *Ibid.*, p. 75, v. 27.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 111, v. 36.

⁴ Hanumant, ch. viii, pp. 131-32.

CHAPTER V

THEOLOGY AND COSMOGONY OF RÂMDÂS

(A) THEOLOGY

Introduction

It is difficult to present the teachings of Râmdâs as a connected whole, because of the wide variety of topics which he discussed and the varied sources from which he drew his ideas. In constructing his religious and social philosophy of life, he showed a certain amount of originality, that made him distinctive among the saints of Mahārāshṭra. As has been previously stated, some of his views were inconsistent with each other and cannot be harmonized. Râmdâs is remembered by some as a bhakta like Rāmānanda, Tukārām or Chaitanya, but this phase of his teaching is not so well known as certain other phases. To a large number he is a Vedāntist and a faithful follower of Śaṅkara, the great commentator on the Vedānta *sūtras* of Bādarāyaṇa. To a still larger number, possibly, Râmdâs is the great example of a poet-politician, a saint who blended with his religious teachings a shrewd common-sense and interest in everyday affairs. In this and the succeeding chapter, an effort will be made to present the teachings of the great Svāmī in a general outline, and to analyse the more important features.

A Vedāntist

In his Vedāntic teaching Râmdâs was a follower of the Advaita philosophy, being familiar with the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavadgītā*. While he taught these doctrines with many minor variations, yet he did not depart from the emphasis laid down by Śaṅkara concerning the great

principles of the Advaita path. In short, he accepted Śaṅkara's interpretation of religious and philosophical truth, as it came to him through other writers, without attempting to change it to suit his own convenience or desire. Like other Vedāntists, he felt that the real can only be reached by emptying one's self of the world.¹ According to this doctrine, God is pure Being, Intelligence and Bliss; but even these words fail to describe him (Brahman), because he is above description, a being that is both immanent and transcendent. Said Rāmdās, 'Parabrahma is everywhere, pervading all. Whether one be sitting or walking, he is in the presence of Parabrahma. All creation is wrapped up in him and he cannot be compared to any other thing. He is nameless, invisible, and beyond the imagination. He pervades all the worlds, including Viṣṇu's heaven, Śivā's mountain, Indra's world, the fourteen worlds, the lower regions of the serpents and all other places. Although single, he invades the entire universe at one and the same time.' In various parts of the *Dāsbodh* and in his miscellaneous poems, Rāmdās enlarges upon this theme, and by many illustrations he seeks to teach his disciples that there is only one reality, namely, Brahman. In his Verses to the Mind, Rāmdās tells of 'Brahman, the form of which cannot be known by the mind, and which is without a second. All illustrations fail to supply a symbol, for in him there is neither attachment nor detachment, and he cannot be described by the *Vedas*, *Śāstras* or *Purāṇas*. He is neither visible nor invisible, and is without a witness, even the Śrūtis being ignorant of the end of Brahman.'² In the seventh chapter of the *Dāsbodh*, section three, Rāmdās says that there are fourteen forms of Brahman, namely, sound, the syllable Om, the sky, the elements of the universe, world energy, spiritual power, all that witnesses to spiritual power, the one with attributes, the one without attributes, that which can be uttered, that which can be communicated, bliss, that which is in harmony with Brahman, and that which cannot be uttered.

¹ Macnicol, p. 60.

² *Manāche Śloka*, Nos. 192, 193.

Along with the doctrine of the one infinite, unknowable, all-pervading God, goes the complementary doctrine of Māyā, as developed by Śaṅkara and taught by Rāmdās. If Brahman is the only reality, then logically the visible world is not real, and as the Svāmī says, it is only fancy that causes us to believe in the reality of the visible world. 'What is seen by the eye does not last eternally, and that which is involved in sudden changes disappears in the course of time. Later on all will go away and nothing remain; therefore, O mind, seek the everlasting and eternal truth. That which cannot be broken or shaken or removed is beyond the reach of consciousness. That Being which exists in one form cannot tolerate the thought of duality; therefore, O mind, seek the everlasting and eternal One.'¹

The question now arises, If all the visible world is merely illusion, and Brahman alone is real, then how can one hope to be saved and attain unto reality? The answer is that God is found by the path of knowledge, and when one reaches the point where he can say, 'I am Brahman,' then he passes beyond this world of illusion and is absorbed into Brahman. Only by knowledge can the truth be known that the human soul is the Supreme Soul, the material universe being but the product of the imagination. 'If seen in the world, this Brahman cannot be known by the physical eye, but only by the eye of knowledge; and while seeing, the very act of seeing goes away. O mind, seek for the eternal and abiding truth.'² In the Svāmī's opinion, it was no easy thing to reach this coveted goal. Said he: 'It is egoism (*ahamkāra*) which produces divisions in that which is indivisible, and it is this very egoism which whispers "I am Brahman" when to say it is nothing but fancy. Only by discrimination, experience and the giving up of desire can Brahman be realized; and to have this experience one must be in harmony with the soul. By pondering our experiences over and over, we should first know ourselves, and then only can we obtain real knowledge.'³

¹ *Manāche Śloka*, Nos. 146, 147.

² *Ibid.*, No. 149.

³ *Dāsbodh*, ch. ix, sec. 2.

To know that 'thou art that' (*tat tvam asi*) means the release of the soul from the cycle of births and deaths, the liberation not merely from the world of illusion, but also from punishment and fate, the hopeless round of existences in which former sins are expiated. Like Brahman, one becomes separated from all action, both good and bad, and is above time and change. Realization of one's unity with Brahman arises from revealed knowledge. It is the achievement of the desire to be free from the burden of life and from the sorrows of this world. It was the doctrine of rebirth and *karma* which led to the emphasis upon salvation. Men began to realize the contrast between the world, on the one hand, with its pain and sorrow, transmigration and expiation of former sins, in a never-ending chain of unfortunate births; and, on the other hand, the Supreme Soul. Hence every Hindu's heart became filled with a passionate longing to be free. Rāmdās taught, 'A wise man is not to be known by his bodily form, because he is Brahman himself and therefore is without birth or death. . . . Once in unity with Brahman, he cannot be man again. As a piece of burnt cloth cannot be unfolded, or as the different currents of a river cannot be separately distinguished, so the wise who know themselves to be one with Brahman become eternal and are free from birth and death.'¹

A Bhakta

Some have an impression that Rāmdās was not a bhakta, inasmuch as he did not belong to the Paṇḍharpūr movement and the Vedāntic note in his teaching was so pronounced. This impression is erroneous, however, and a study of the Svāmī's poetry reveals that he was no less devoted to Rāma than others were to Viṭhobā. He is fully entitled to be classed as a Vaishṇavite bhakta, although it must be freely admitted that his teachings were not so exclusively along the line of bhakti as either the Paṇḍharpūr or Chaitanya movements. While he neither broke through the caste system, nor taught personal salvation in the exclusive bhakti sense, yet the bhakti element

¹ *Dāsboḍh*, ch. ix, sec. 3.

in the Rāmdāsī sect has always been very important. The Verses Imploring Mercy (*Karuṇāśhṭake*) and the Verses to the Mind are the sections of the Svāmī's poetry which emphasize the bhakti strain most clearly. As Rāmdās meditated on Rāma, his mind became distressed, and in the consciousness of sin, he yielded his heart in repentance. 'O Rāma, every day I have been consumed by repentance and my unsteady mind cannot be restrained. O thou who art merciful to the poor, remove from me this māyā which produces illusion, and hasten to me; for without thee I become fatigued. I have spent all my life without worshipping thee, and have regarded friends and wealth with selfishness and envy. O Lord of the Raghus, grant me a mind like thine, so that in giving up all I may cling to thee in faith. Happiness cannot be obtained by satisfying the passions, and without thee, O Lord of the Raghus, everything is vain. Bless me, therefore, with thy goodness and remove all my sin, so that I may be filled with Brahman.'¹

In these and other verses the bhakti doctrine is clearly expressed. Rāma is the loving god who saves his humble, penitent worshipper from sin, worldly evils and the cycle of rebirths. Salvation is obtained by the genuineness of devotion and faith, rather than by knowledge or ascetic practices. Again and again, the Svāmī emphasizes his need of Rāma and the hopelessness of life without him. 'Throughout crores of births my heart has been burning; therefore, O Rāma, overpower me with the flood of thy mercy and remove from me the obstruction of the Six Enemies, thus bringing me satisfaction in my distress. O Rāma, except for thee, who will know of my piteous condition? O lion, hasten to me as I, exhausted, wait upon thee; for without thee, horrible desires lead me astray.'²

The thought in these verses covers a wide range, from the pessimistic note of helplessness to the sense of gratitude for favours which have been granted by Rāma. Although the positive, victorious theme is less noticeable than that of humble need, it is none the less present. 'I have often

¹ *Karuṇāśhṭake*, Dhulia ed., No. 147.

² *Ibid.*, Dhulia ed., No. 147.

committed sins which thou hast forgiven, O Lord of the Raghus. How many virtues of thine am I to remember, and how shall we repay our obligation to thee? Thou dost profess to be Lord of the needy, and this profession of thine has proved to be true. Thou hast given several kinds of happiness and thou knowest what is in my inmost heart. Thy natural kindness has fulfilled all my desires ; therefore, powerful one, how shall we repay our obligation to thee? Dās says that as thou hast saved the devotees, so save me, that my end may be happy. O powerful one, how shall we repay our obligation to thee? ¹

In speaking of Rāma as the cool shade, Rāmdās emphasizes that salvation is to be found in him alone. 'In the world, wisdom cannot be seen ; and Rāma's form, although it is near, yet it cannot be recognized. The unsteady mind cannot be made steady, neither can pride be overcome. O Lord of the universe, fate can be averted only by thee.'² Again, he says that there are many gods but only one true God, who alone must be worshipped ; thus approaching the theistic position. 'There are various kinds of gods whom men seek in this world, some metal, some stone, and some earthen, but how can we consider anything which is destructible to be God? Only the real God should have our respectful recognition. Many gods have been subject to birth and death, and numerous gods will be born in the future just as they have been in the past ; but gods which can be destroyed are false, and the real God alone should receive our respectful recognition.'³ In this passage Rāmdās seems to speak neither as an idolater nor as a Vedāntist, but as a thoroughgoing theist, although even here there may be certain Vedāntic conceptions clinging to his thought.

Salvation

A large portion of the Svāmī's poetry deals with this general theme ; salvation by knowledge and salvation by

¹ *Karuṇāshṭake*, Dhulia ed., No. 3. ² *Ibid.*, Dhulia ed., No. 141.

³ *Ibid.*, Dhulia ed., No. 7.

faith having already been discussed. In certain sections, he also taught salvation by works (*Karma Mārṅga*) with its four stages for the attainment of salvation (*mokṣa* or *mukṭi*). These are *salokatā*, or living in the neighbourhood of the Supreme Spirit (*Paramātmān*); *saṁīpatā*, or nearness to God; *sarūpatā*, or likeness to God, reflecting his glory; and, fourthly, *sayujyatā*, or absorption in God. He taught that to win *mokṣa* one must be freed from the 'states of the soul,' namely, the waking state, the dreaming state, the deep-sleep state and the resignation state; until one has attained the state of being absorbed into Brahman. In one place he referred to the seeker as passing through the three steps, of hearing, of thinking, and of meditating deeply, before attaining release. One of the most frequent classifications he used for the spiritual pilgrim was a fourfold one, namely, *baddha*, or confined to this world; *mumukṣu*, or desiring release; *sādhaka*, or achieving release; and *siddha*, or release achieved.

The *baddha* is like a blind man groping in the darkness, unable to distinguish between good and bad, the fit and the unfit, action or inaction, reality or illusion. Such a man is devoid of knowledge and has neither mental peace nor the sense of forgiveness. He may be talkative, passionate, proud, angry, contemptuous, cruel, greedy, or lazy; and intent upon worldly associations, he may give himself up to unworthy pursuits.¹ The *mumukṣu* is the one who, upon hearing the Śāstras, repents and begins to loathe his worldly enjoyments, desiring to be freed from it all. He admits his past sins, his selfishness, pride and hypocrisy, and is eager to seek the company of good persons who will be instrumental in securing his release. His mental attitude is one of deep humiliation, and he passes his time in soul-discipline and in the search for holy places.² The *sādhaka* is one who has cast off his bad habits or worldly ties, spending his time in the company of good persons and realizing the importance of self-wisdom. Such a one has risen above evil practices, egoism, doubts and fears. By his own efforts he realizes that the world is

¹ *Dāsbodh*, ch. v, sec. 7.

² *Ibid.*, ch. v, sec. 8.

false and that Brahman alone is real. His physical body loses all control over his spirit, and the karma of evil actions no longer holds sway. Neither dejected, idle, nor swayed by sense-desire, he lives a pure life, with his thoughts fixed upon those things which are good.¹ The siddha is the one who is at rest in God, with all doubts removed and all attachments severed. For such a one the body has no existence, as he lives in Brahman; he *is* Brahman.² In still another section, in the seventh chapter of the *Dāsboḍh*, Rāmdās speaks of there being three kinds of salvation: namely, freedom from this body; freedom from this life; and freedom for eternity.

From the foregoing it is evident that to Rāmdās the path of the spiritual pilgrim was a long and arduous one, and salvation was no easy, quiet, passive process. It required severe renunciation and a determination to sever one's self from all worldly ties and complications which only served to keep one apart from God. It also entailed rigid mental concentration, so that the devotee might discriminate carefully between the good and the bad, the true and the false. Religious acts had their value, but they were considered to be but the external manifestation of the *spiritual life* of the seeker, and this was considered to be the important thing, according to the teaching of the *Dnyāna-mārga* (Salvation by Knowledge) as given by Rāmdās. Death was a purely physical concept to Rāmdās, and related primarily to the disintegration of the human body, without any permanent relationship to the soul, which immediately entered into another body or achieved final release by being absorbed into Brahman. This absorption was heaven itself, and no one could wish for any higher bliss or satisfaction. To fail to win this release and to continue to be bound by the endless chain of rebirths, was to suffer the punishment which every Hindu dreaded.

Devotion and Faith

In discussing the nine kinds of devotion, Rāmdās generally used the language of the bhakta or of 'the lower know-

¹ *Dāsboḍh*, ch. v, sec. 9.

² *Ibid.*, ch. v, sec. 10.

ledge,' rather than that of the pantheist and the 'higher knowledge.' He was reflecting the spirit of Vaishṇavism and the *Gītā*. It was the realm of prayer and penitence rather than that of renunciation and mental concentration. The nine kinds of devotion are: Hearing (*śravaṇa*), kīrtans or musical services, remembering God (*smaraṇa*), serving the guru's feet (*padasevana*), worship (*archana*), salutation (*vandana*), service (*dāśya*), friendship (*sakhyā*), and finally, offering of the self (*ātmanivedana*). The Svāmī discussed these various kinds of devotion in much detail. He believed that no one could hope to worship God without listening to the stories from the sacred scriptures, which revealed the riches of spiritual knowledge. Much of his preaching was done through the medium of the kīrtan, which held a high place in his esteem, and which from time immemorial has been the natural method by which Hindu religious poets have sung the praises of God. Remembering and muttering God's name must have been of great importance to Rāmdās, inasmuch as he refers to them continually, both in the *Dāśbodh* and in his miscellaneous poems. 'O mind, do not relinquish this name because of jealousy, but rather meditate upon it continually, with due respect; for it is the very essence among all things, and nothing can be compared with it.'¹ 'There are several names, but none can be compared with that of Rāma, although this cannot be known by the man who is wretched or unfortunate. If Śaṅkar, the Lord of Parvatī, took this name as a remedy for poison, then what of men?'²

Serving the feet was a mode of devotion directed primarily toward the teacher or *sadguru* who, Rāmdās believed, was absolutely essential in the attainment of salvation. It was the sadguru or good teacher who pointed the way and revealed the means by which the pilgrim might hope to attain the coveted goal, be it the merging of the soul with Brahman or spiritual fellowship with Rāma. The devotion of worship was directed mainly toward the *saguna* idol (the god with qualities as opposed to the abstract Brahman), and was regularly prescribed in the Śāstras.

¹ *Manāche Sloka*, No. 81.

² *Ibid.*, No. 82.

It also consisted of reverence for saintly persons and the worship of the family deity, whoever that happened to be. Salutation meant that the worshipper should prostrate himself before the idols and before the guru, and before all other persons who by their wisdom or saintliness merited such adoration. The worshipper should be ready at all times to render whatever services might be required, either in the temple or at home and during anniversaries, festivities and important religious functions. Friendship, the eighth devotion, is important, because it shows that Rāmdās regarded Rāma not simply as an all-powerful god or as saviour, but also as a friend who found satisfaction in the friendship of the devotee. Self-consecration, or the ninth devotion, was stressed by the Svāmī as a matter of supreme moment, and was applicable both to the bhakta and to the Vedāntist.

In dealing with the teaching of Rāmdās about God, it is difficult to draw the line between pantheism and idolatry on the one hand, and between idolatry and theism on the other. When swayed by his Vedāntic conceptions, he criticized idolatry as unworthy and said that gods of metal or stone were perishable.¹ Yet as a bhakta of Rāma, he established a number of shrines for Rāma and Mārutī in different places. Said he, 'The one who neglects to worship the idol (God with qualities) because he considers himself well versed in the knowledge of Brahman (God without qualities), will eventually be deprived of both.'² Yet it is hard to believe that the devotional verses of the Svāmī were directed toward the idol alone, without any higher conception. At times he must have approached the theistic position, and thought of Rāma as a spiritual God rather than as a piece of stone. On the other hand, he accepted idolatry and made it one of the cardinal features of the Rāmdāsī sect. He taught that there were four classes of deities, namely, idols, incarnations (*avatāras*), God in the human soul, and the Supreme Spirit (Brahman).³ Hence it is evident that the Svāmī believed in all of these four

¹ *Manāche Śloka*, No. 176.

² *Dāsbodh*, ch. x, sec. 7.

³ *Dāsbodh*, ch. xi, sec. 2.

classes ; although his emphasis was not always the same. To him the idols were sacred images and divine in themselves. Yet he also thought of Rāma as an incarnation of Viṣṇu and a personal spiritual God, the object of his devotional verses. As the *Gītā* magnified the Lord Kṛiṣṇa, so, to Rāmdās, Śrī Rāma was the lord of his life. Whether he consistently drew a distinction between Rāma the idol and Rāma the hero-god is an open question. Although he may have done so at times, yet, in the writer's opinion, he attributed miraculous qualities to the idol itself, taught his followers to pray to it, and therefore was a supporter of idolatry, as many references show. It was chiefly when he was carried away by his enthusiasm for salvation by knowledge that he stressed the uselessness of idol-worship. At most other times he accepted it as a useful aid in the daily religious routine.

(B) COSMOGONY

The Primary Substances

Like his theology, the Svāmī's cosmogony is not always consistent, and it is sometimes difficult to know what his exact teaching is in regard to the origin and the construction of the universe. In the main, like the *Gītā*, he accepted the Sāṃkhya theories concerning the universe, together with certain ideas from the Vedānta, and developed them with illustrations of his own, taking certain liberties with the original Sāṃkhya theories. He mentions the two eternal existences, namely, original nature (*prakṛiti*), and spirit (*puruṣa*), but he speaks of them as the product of *mūlamāyā*, which is the creation of Brahman, and is like the ether that permeates the universe. Said he, 'As the air is to the sky, so is *mūlamāyā* to Brahman ; and in it are the five elements and the three qualities. The seed of the banyan tree contains the tree within it, though it cannot be found within it if the seed be broken. What is hidden is sure to come to light, however, and this is true of *mūlamāyā*, from which comes the expansion of the universe, and in which are two elements. In the immovable sky we can sense the movement of the wind which is

nature (*prakṛiti*) and within the wind is the life energy or soul (*puruṣa*) which is like God himself. From this wind are produced the three qualities : goodness (*sattva*), energy (*rajas*), and darkness (*tamas*).¹

The Order of Creation

This order is explained by the Svāmī as follows : Brahman, *mūlamāyā*, the three qualities, the five elements, the four creations, the four tongues, and the eighty-four lakhs (8,400,000) of living creatures.² This is how the process develops, 'From Brahman is born the *mūlamāyā*, existing in the form of wind and consisting of the five elements and the three properties. Space creates wind, wind creates fire, fire creates water, water creates earth, and the latter produces mankind and the various living creatures. In this earth are various kinds of stones, which are the symbols of numerous deities ; and these deities exist in the form of life-energy, sometimes visible, sometimes invisible. The wind that we feel is of one nature, and the latent life-energy within is of another nature. From the wind, light is produced, both hot and cold ; and this leads to fire, lightning, and the sun ; the latter creating water, nectar, the moon and the stars. The earth has two constituent parts, the first containing stones and earthen material, the second containing gold and jewels.'³

The above statement seems rather childish to the student of modern science, but it represents the actual views of orthodox Hindu religious teachers of the Svāmī's period ; and there are sections of the Hindu community which still accept the classifications and numbers as taught by the Svāmī. In describing the process of creation, in another section, he speaks of *mūlamāyā* as consciousness, existing as life-energy, which, when it becomes manifested in the three qualities, is called *guṇamāyā*. 'As the latent life-energy manifests itself in the three qualities, sound is first produced, after which come innumerable forms, the first sound

¹ *Dāśbodh*, ch. x, sec. 9.

² *Ibid.*, ch. xx, sec. 5.

³ *Ibid.*, ch. x, sec. 3.

“Om ” being a property of space. From sound, the Vedas and Śāstras have come into existence ; from space, the wind ; from wind, the light ; from light, the water ; and from the water, the earth. Each of the five elements is composed of parts of the other four elements, and this is also true of the three qualities. Although the elements seem to be separate, they are one, as a matter of fact. The three qualities dominate all actions to a greater or less degree. Just as a mixture of any two colours gives a third colour, so thousands of different things are produced by the three qualities with the help of the five elements.”¹

In discussing the origin of the universe Rāmdās states that the gods cannot be the creators, because they themselves are composed of the five elements. Brahman is changeless, and therefore cannot have been an active participant in the process. If, then, there is no active creator, the universe must be born of the imagination and possesses no reality within itself.² In another section the Svāmī describes creation as being revealed in three processes, namely, from mūlamāyā to guṇamāyā ; from the three qualities to the earth ; and from the earth to the various creations and the four tongues.³ Still another classification is fourfold : Brahman ; the fourteen names of māyā ; the five elements ; and the four creations.⁴ He discusses in great detail the composition of the various steps, describing mūlamāyā occasionally as the fourth quality or phase of the universe, grouped with the other three qualities, and the root of prakṛiti, which in turn produces the eight kinds of nature. Guṇamāyā is a mixture of the three qualities, and all living creatures are a mixture of the three subtle qualities with the five grosser elements, made up in varying proportions. The four tongues or seats of speech are : the navel, the heart, the neck and the mouth.⁵ Still another classification of speech is : the deeply secret, the mental, that which reaches the lips, and that which is spoken.⁶

¹ *Dāsbodh*, ch. ix, sec. 6.

² *Ibid.*, ch. xiii, sec. 8.

³ *Ibid.*, ch. xx, sec. 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, ch. xx, sec. 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, ch. xx, sec. 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, ch. xi, sec. 1.

Living Creatures

Concerning mankind and animals, Rāmdās is not always consistent, either in the description of the process or in the numbers; but this is not surprising when we remember the long period of years during which he wrote poetry and the complexity of the subject matter. From the large number of verses concerned with the story of creation it is clear that the subject held a fascination for him. The number of living beings, most commonly given by him, is 8,400,000, of whom 400,000 are human beings. They are described as being created from water and as being favoured by the atmospheric and climatic conditions upon the earth. Says the Svāmī, 'If there had been no fire, wind or sun, the water upon the earth would have been cold and all living creatures would have been frozen to death. . . . When the earth is dry from the heat of the sun, God sends rain upon it to cool it off and the winter season results. When all animals become distressed because of the cold and the trees become withered, the summer season ensues. Living beings exist in an orderly arrangement of time, which is divided into morning, noon and evening.'¹ This is the day for ordinary mortals, but the day of Brahman is composed of the four ages, namely, the Kṛitayuga of 1,728,000 years; the Tretāyuga of 1,296,000 years; the Dvāparayuga of 864,000 years; and the Kaliyuga of 432,000 years.²

There are a number of classifications of living beings, one of the most common being that of insects, birds, mankind, and trees.³ Mankind, he says in one verse, is created from eggs. In describing the various types of animals and their value in the general scheme of creation, he says, 'Worms are more slender than particles of dust, with a short life and a very meagre knowledge. Although possessing the fivefold mind (heart, conscience, mind, intellect and egoism), their knowledge and other qualities are proportionate to their bodies. In all these animals, from the smallest insects to the largest elephant, there is the

¹ *Dāsbodh*, ch. xvi, sec. 10.² *Ibid.*, ch. vi, sec. 4.³ *Ibid.*, ch. xi, sec. 1.

same internal soul (all-pervading spirit). . . . Wherever water exists there are living animals, as provided for in the laws of nature, some being born from mere imagination, some from penance and some otherwise, because God's ways are unfathomable.'¹

In the seventeenth chapter of the *Dāsbodh*, section nine, Rāmdās classifies bodies as being of four varieties: the gross, the subtle, the causal, and the blissful; corresponding to wakefulness, dreaming, sound sleep, and absorption in Brahman; and these four bodies have different qualities and different kinds of enjoyment. He analyses the different parts of the human body with great detail, speaking of five kinds of breath, the five organs of perception, the five organs of action, the fivefold mind, and the five senses corresponding to the organs of perception, making twenty-five faculties in all. Each of these groups of faculties or properties he relates to one of the five original elements. As there are twenty-five elements in the gross material body, so also are there twenty-five elements in the subtle spiritual body. For example, the properties of space in the subtle body are: passion, anger, grief, temptation, and fear; of wind, the five properties are: movement, turning, expansion, resistance and contraction; of light, the five properties are: hunger, thirst, laziness, sleep and sexual intercourse; etc. The 'causal body' is that of ignorance and the 'bliss body' is that of knowledge, the spiritual seeker passing from the gross to the subtle, and to final emancipation when the very self is offered (*ātmanivedaṇa*) and pure Brahman alone remains.²

Rāmdās compares the human body to a tree of worldly existence, which has slowly matured until it bears fruits that seem sweet to those who taste them and think that they have thus obtained happiness.³ In this and other references the Svāmī shows his disapproval of too much emphasis upon the physical body; yet it is also true that he had a high regard for the dignity of the human body and felt that it was part and parcel of the divine order of

¹ *Dāsbodh*, ch. xv, sec. 8.

² *Ibid.*, ch. xvii, sec. 8.

³ *Ibid.*, ch. xx, sec. 8.

things. He says, for example, that it would be impossible to worship God except through the medium of the human body, and he often refers with sharp words of warning to those who misuse or abuse the human body. Hence he takes issue with the more extreme forms of ascetic practices carried on by numerous Hindu devotees, who seek to attain salvation by their physical sufferings, and he did not encourage such practice among his own followers.

In the latter part of the *Dāsbodh* he develops his doctrine of the internal soul (*chañchal*). In some details this doctrine resembles the Sāṃkhya doctrine of the puruṣa, and it also reminds one a little of Kabīr's 'subtle entity' from which come individual souls.¹ He says that the *chañchal* is one, but has different forms, and is the support of birds, animals and men. This would seem to be a recognition of one classification for both animals and men, and a suggestion that human souls may be reborn in the bodies of birds or other animals. This *chañchal* even causes trees to grow and without it the trees would become dead wood. In some references the Svāmī seems to identify the *chañchal* with Brahman, and yet again he distinguishes between the two. The *chañchal*, he says, causes movement in all bodies, and has spatial limitations, not being everywhere at once like the all-pervading Brahman.² In another reference he says that the *chañchal* is composed of the five elements and is like a king, sitting on a throne, surrounded by his armies, both armies and king being composed of flesh and bone. Similarly, both the universe and the *chañchal* are in the form of the five elements, consciousness being the chief difference between the two, the *chañchal* witnessing to the universe and giving authority to it.³ This recalls the Sāṃkhya idea of the self-conscious soul, enmeshed in the body, shedding the light of its self-consciousness upon the inner organs.⁴ From his descriptions it almost seems as though *chañchal* is a spiritual world-force that animates all living beings; the throbbing of Brahman in the visible

¹ *Hindu Ethics*, by Prof. John McKenzie, p. 173.

² *Dāsbodh*, ch. xv, sec. 5.

³ *Dāsbodh*, ch. xv, sec. 3.

⁴ *The Crown of Hinduism*, by Dr. J. N. Farquhar, p. 238.

world, antedating even the three properties and the five elements. He sometimes identifies *chañchaḷ* with the sky, which he terms the chief element among the five. More subtle than the wind, it pervades all, and though it cannot be found, yet nothing can move without it. From *mūḷamāyā* to the most minute bodies, everything moves by means of it, and beyond it there is the changeless Brahman.¹ When he says, as he does in a number of passages, that to know that the *chañchaḷ* pervades all is to become one with Brahman, it again seems as though he identified the one with the other. In still another passage he asserts that *chañchaḷ* and Śrī Rāma are one and the same.² In fact, all deeds and transactions, all demons and men, good and bad thoughts, politics and desires, are carried on by means of *chañchaḷ*, which is in all and through all and gives movement to all. Although Rāmdās identifies animals and men in certain allusions, nevertheless he finds certain distinctions between them and asserts that mankind alone can know about heaven and earth, being the protector of lower forms of living beings.³

The Destruction of the Universe

Concerning the end of creation the Svāmī had very definite ideas. He taught that for twelve years there would be no rain and the whole earth would be split and cracked by the heat of the sun, from which flames of fire would pour forth. For a hundred years, so the prophecy goes, the earth will burn, until the serpent which holds the earth upon its head will be touched by the flames and will vomit poison. Thereupon the lower regions will be consumed to ashes and the earth will succumb to the fury of the five elements, the eleven destructive deities and the twelve suns, with the result that the earth will fall to pieces and disappear, the moon and the stars also going to destruction. This will be followed by a period of rain, when the universe will be filled with water and covered with darkness. A mass of hot iron will then

¹ *Dāsbodh*, ch. xvi, sec. 7.

² *Ibid.*, ch. xvi, sec. 8.

³ *Ibid.*, ch. xx, sec. 5.

arise and cause the earth to dry up, after which fire and destructive winds will again break forth, but will finally melt away in the wide expanse of sky. The five elements will disappear and mūlamāyā will cease its throbbing, the immovable, eternal Brahman alone remaining.¹

In another chapter, he says there are five kinds of destruction, namely, sleep, death, the rest-period of the three gods, the destruction of the three gods, and the annihilation of old ideas. Sleep periodically overpowers the activities of wakefulness. At death, the life-breath leaves the body, due to the activity of a disease or for some other cause. When Brahmā, one of the trinity, sleeps, all mortal activities are suspended for a period of years until he awakes, and then the whole of creation again begins to stir. At the end of Brahmadeva's life, the world is reduced to ashes by the heat of the sun, and all other worlds are also burned up. Then follows the deluge, when everything is submerged in water, after which the universe again bursts into flames, until the flames are swallowed up by a mighty wind. The wind in turn dies away into space, and creation, which is the revelation of God, once more merges with God. As long as the human body survives, one should use spiritual discrimination, thus ultimately destroying the personality and sinking the self into reality.²

The Purāṇic Influence

There is still one further influence that must be mentioned, which helped to shape the Svāmī's cosmogony, namely, the Purāṇic influence; and a trace of this may be seen in one or two passages already referred to. In spite of the sharp cleavage between the mathematical Sāṅkhya theories and the mythological Purāṇic conceptions, Rāmdās did not hesitate to teach the latter ideas at one time or another, although it must be recognized that they did not figure largely in his thought. In one place, stating that water comes from light and the earth from water, he goes on to say that the earth is held up by a serpent. On the earth

¹ *Dāsboḍh*, ch. xiii, sec. 4.

² *Ibid.*, ch. x, sec. 5.

are seven oceans, in the midst of which is the golden mountain, and this in turn supports the earth. The mountain is eight miles broad and of a great height, with a guardian for each of the eight directions. Around the earth are other mountains, among which are the Himālaya mountains where the Pāṇḍavas became fatigued, and only Dharmarāj and Śrī Kṛishṇa reached the top. Along the way there are large serpents and *āśramas* for ascetics. On Mt. Meru there are three summits where Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva dwell; the summit of Brahmā being of stone, that of Viṣṇu of emerald, and that of Śiva of marble. There also are to be found the thirty-three crores of gods, the fourteen worlds, and the golden mountain. In that place also are heavenly trees, cows, and lakes of nectar where one may avoid death. All the earth is joyful with singing; there is neither old age nor death in that place, because this is the abode of the gods.¹ Yet even here, while teaching the primitive stories of the early Aryans, he ends the section by saying that three salvations are transitory, and that at the final salvation even the gods will be destroyed, immovable, eternal Brahman alone remaining.

¹ *Dāsbodh*, ch. iv, sec. 10.

CHAPTER VI

HIS ETHICS AND GENERAL TEACHINGS

(A) ETHICS

Introduction

THE most remarkable feature of the Svāmī's ethical teaching is its wide scope. He not only subscribed to the ethical doctrines and standards which were inherent in the Vaishṇavite movement and the worship of Rāma, but he also taught the precepts of the orthodox Dnyāna-mārga. It is not always possible to know where he laid the greatest emphasis, as he sometimes stressed spiritual qualities, and at other times he was mainly concerned with more practical matters. On the whole, his ethical teachings reached a lofty height ; and while he may not have been as logical as Rāmānanda, or as original as Kabīr, or as consistent as Tukārām, yet he resembled each of them in certain particulars. The Svāmī set such a high ethical standard for his followers that it became a more select group than some of the more popular movements like that of Paṇḍharpūr. In this sense the sect was somewhat exclusive, and rewarded those who became the most worthy and trusted followers. The discipline within the sect began with the mental life, touching the hidden springs within ; concerned itself with the spoken word and the relationships between individuals ; and finally laid down rules of conduct that affected practically all the normal activities of daily life.

Purity

Both by precept and example, Rāmdās insisted on pure living, both in thought and deed, as his writings amply illustrate. In speaking of the ideal of celibacy, he says, 'He who, amongst many, looks only to the one God ;

such a man always behaves as he teaches. He who always worships the idol without allowing his mind to wander is indeed a blessed servant of the great God.¹ Purity in thought and life can be maintained by the householder as well as by the celibate, and is therefore primarily a matter of the mind rather than of social relationships. In one verse he says, 'If you think before speaking or before acting, others, who may be unfortunate, will be comforted. Never engage in conversation without first making suitable inquiries, and thus behave both temperately and correctly among all men.'² If the mind were kept pure and unsullied, the Svāmī was confident that moral behaviour would be above reproach. When dealing with moral lapses, he was a strict disciplinarian and did not hesitate to prescribe severe punishment if he felt it was necessary. The way to keep the mind and the conduct pure was to centre one's entire thought upon God and to associate with worthy people. It was to the idle and the indifferent that sinful thoughts came.

Unselfishness

This was a quality of mind and heart which Rāmdās frequently extolled. He often thought of it as lack of desire, and spoke reproachfully of those who allowed the desire for fame, money or other worldly goods to distract their minds or stultify their spiritual longings. Here we have a theological as well as an ethical implication, since absence from desire was a necessary attitude of mind in order to be united with Brahman. 'O mind, turning away from fame, and ignoring the body, it is best that you should waste away like sandalwood paste.'³ 'O mind, do not desire the money of others nor cling to selfish interests, for such desires are sinful.'⁴ The Svāmī was not content with this passive virtue, however, and frequently praised the more positive traits of self-sacrifice and benevolence so much so that Mr. S. S. Dev speaks of the latter as the tenth principle of the Rāmdāsī sect. In speaking of the mahant, Rāmdās says that he should react kindly toward both good and

¹ *Manāche Śloka*, No. 49.

² *Ibid.*, No. 132.

³ *Ibid.*, No. 8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, No. 9.

bad conduct, without any spirit of retaliation, and should willingly endure indignities at the hands of others, losing no opportunity of being helpful to the people around him. Just as Rāmdās praised those who gave themselves willingly in the service of others, so he censured those who were greedy, covetous, or self-centred, cutting them with biting sarcasm or lashing them with stinging rebukes ; for he did not mince his words. Sinfulness, in his opinion, brought its own punishment ; and he inferred that goodness brought its own reward. The most meritorious deed of all was the full, complete self-surrender to God, and this leads the way to ultimate salvation.

Truthfulness

If personal honour is a basis of our Christian Anglo-Saxon civilization, it was no less stressed by this austere Hindu saint of the seventeenth century. 'O mind, cleave to the truth because it is eternal, and eschew that which is false because it passes away. Speak the truth only, with the tongue, and give up that which is unreal.'¹ He taught his disciples to blend kindness with their truthful speaking, saying, 'It is clear that kind words spoken by us bring happiness, and therefore we should have the same regard for others that we have for ourselves. If we discover each day that we are distressed by harsh words, why then should we adopt that tone toward others? . . . That tongue is evil which makes others unhappy, and sooner or later it will cause us harm. We reap as we sow ; as we speak, so are we answered ; therefore why should we speak harsh words?'² Insisting that words should be consistent with deeds, he speaks thus of a good man: 'Words without acts are useless. We should act benevolently toward others, and serve them so that their needs may be supplied, rendering all possible assistance to those who are in trouble and winning them by our gracious words. Sympathizing with the sorrows of others, rejoicing in the happiness of others, forgiving the faults of others, and loving them as we love

¹ *Manāche Śloka*, No. 19.

² *Dāsbodh*, ch. xii, sec. 10.

ourselves, thus should we seek to serve them in every possible way.¹

Sympathy and Patience

Forbearance was one of the qualities he commended, and in speaking against angry passions he says, 'O mind, dwell always in the company of good people, devoid of all semblance of anger; and by giving up fellowship with wicked persons, thou shalt become entitled to salvation.'² He frequently referred to *rajas* (passion), one of the three primary qualities, implying that it was what linked a man with unworthy, worldly ties, such as clothes, ornaments or property. Sympathetic understanding of the sufferings of others and a patient willingness to accept the vicissitudes of life, no matter how harsh or unpleasant, were typical of the Svāmī's teaching.

Forgiveness and Humility

Mr. Dev calls forgiveness the ninth principle of the Rāmdāsī sect, recalling the passage where Rāmdās says, 'A mahant should always forgive faults, whether great or small.'³ His insistence upon humility is evidenced both by his positive teaching and by his contempt for the opposite qualities, such as pride and conceit. 'Because of egoism we become sad, and the words that we speak are vain. By our happiness others are made happy, and therefore you should seek to discover whether you are guilty of egoism.'⁴ 'He who is free from pride, envy or self-interest, and who is uninfluenced by worldly concerns, and who always speaks sweet and humble words, such a servant receives God's blessing in this world.'⁵

Happiness

In approving happiness Rāmdās touched a chord that seems distinctly modern, and awakens a response among practical people of our own day. He thought of it, in

¹ *Dāsbodh*, ch. xii, sec. 10.

² *Dāsbodh*, ch. xi, sec. 5, v. 5.

³ *Manāche Śloka*, No. 107.

⁴ *Manāche Śloka*, No. 161.

⁵ *Manāche Śloka*, No. 51.

the negative sense, as freedom from the sense of self. 'O mind, do not dwell upon sorrow, but rather avoid grief and anxiety. By the practice of thoughtful meditation, we should give up egoism and thus enjoy freedom.'¹ In a personal letter to the author, Mr. Dev writes that the two statements by Rāmdās which reveal his inmost motives are, first, 'That all should be happy'; and, second, 'One must treat others as he would treat himself.' Such sayings as these have caught the imagination of the Marāṭhā people, and kindled their devotion, with the result that Rāmdās has become one of their most revered saints. A study of his verses leads one to the view that he believed in happiness, not simply as a means for the attainment of salvation, but also as an end in itself. Speaking of the sad man, he says, 'Through sadness we obtain neither earthly nor heavenly happiness; nay, rather are we burdened by our anxieties until our business is ruined and we become absent-minded. By sadness we are chained to the cycle of rebirths and find that we can attain nothing, neither worship nor knowledge. Success being unobtainable, the sad man sits with his mind in a whirl; though attentive, he does not comprehend; though listening, he does not hear; though possessed of knowledge, he cannot distinguish between right and wrong.'² In another passage Rāmdās says, 'Instructions given to a sad man are like a jewel entrusted to a monkey or a great treasure given to a devil.'³ In some of these passages the idea of sadness (*duṣchītpaṇ*) has the thought of sullenness rather than that of deep grief, the sad man being one who is dejected, discouraged or hopeless. Rāmdās revealed his shrewd common sense when he asserted that happiness was often a by-product, and the logical result of good habits or faithful actions. 'As work becomes successful, man is made happier day by day, his entire mental life being stimulated. When the favourable moment comes in the life of a man who has suffered sorrow, God mercifully grants him happiness.'⁴

¹ *Manāche Sloka*, No. 12.

² *Dāsbodh*, ch. viii, sec. 6.

³ *Dāsbodh*, ch. viii, sec. 6.

⁴ *Ibid.*, ch. xviii, sec. 10.

Faithfulness to Duties

In building up his movement, Rāmdās laid out a plan of life and action for all his followers, insisting upon rigorous obedience and the faithful performance of all duties. In commenting upon laziness, he says, 'When a man is indolent he has no peace, being incapable of thought and neglectful of both studies and duties. Unable either to study or to teach, and weakened in his desire to attain supreme knowledge, he fails to perform his daily rites and practices. Idleness begets idleness, so that a man loses both his mental powers and his courage, with the result that he is unable properly to pursue his daily task.'¹ It sometimes seems as though Rāmdās inveighed against laziness more often than he did against wickedness; but this was doubtless due to the widespread laziness, both mental and spiritual, which had become so pronounced during the three centuries of Moslem rule, that he felt it must be uprooted at all costs, in order to bring about a Hindu religious revival.

Summary

A study of the Svāmī's ethical teachings gives us a clue to the social and religious conditions of his time; because whatever he had to say was pertinent to the situation. In discussing the value of time, he condemned garrulousness and silly gossip as a sheer waste of time that should be spent in doing something profitable. Malicious gossip he frowned upon, because it caused an endless amount of trouble and sorrow and showed an evil mind. It was his frequent custom to encourage his disciples by holding up before them an ideal. Likewise, he sometimes painted the picture of an evil disciple and held it up as a warning to those who might be tempted to forget their vows. In describing the characteristics of a good man, he says, 'Such a man is possessed of good qualities and commends himself to all. Proficient in both reading and writing, he is able to interpret successfully the spiritual meaning of scripture passages. Eschewing a factional spirit, he

¹ *Dāsbodh*, ch. viii, sec. 6.

chooses to mingle with those who are good, and they are stimulated by his fellowship, finding in him a worthy associate. Such people, possessed of the best qualities, gain universal approval and are friendly with one and all. Humble in asking questions, possessed of deep spiritual knowledge, free from hypocrisy, temperate in habit, and with a loving heart, such a man is indeed pleasing to all men.¹

In describing an evil or luckless man, the Svāmī says, 'Poverty is caused by sin, which in turn increases poverty. An evil man prefers laziness to strenuous exertion, being always fond of sinful deeds, and is heartily disliked by everybody because of his tendency for idle speaking in moments of drowsiness. He knows nothing concerning reading, writing, business transactions, or accounts, and is utterly devoid of shrewdness. Whatever he possesses he either loses, drops, throws away or breaks. His memory is forgetful, his habits bad, and he avoids the company of good people, preferring to associate with rogues, clowns, thieves and vicious companions. Ever alert to quarrel, he does not hesitate to play the part of a highwayman. Devoid of prudence, and with a dislike for both justice and morality, he is a man of implacable greed.'² Such pictures as these, when once seen, can never be forgotten. In summing up, we would again state that while Rāmdās may not be distinctive in any particular ethical emphasis, his ability to combine in his own life, and to teach others, such opposite traits as patience and zeal, forgiveness and strict discipline, humility and forcefulness, self-sacrifice and faithfulness in social and political duties, with the resulting emphasis upon personal development, makes him noteworthy among the Hindu religious teachers of Western India.

(B) HIS GENERAL TEACHINGS

Intelligence

It is not surprising that Rāmdās laid such emphasis upon mental development, when we consider his twelve

¹ *Dāsbodh*, ch. xix, sec. 8.

² *Ibid.*, ch. xix, sec. 3.

years at Ṭākerlī followed by the years of travel, during which he familiarized himself with the Hindu sacred scriptures. This thorough preparation enabled him to deal with all classes of men and women, both ignorant and intelligent, and it gave him a high appreciation of those advantages which are the fruits of intellectual efforts. In all of the Rāmdāsī maṭhs, learning was held at a premium, and young disciples were expected to pursue their studies faithfully, both for their own improvement and in order to teach others. The Svāmī had little respect for those who failed to improve themselves because of laziness or indifference, although he naturally recognized that many people had scant opportunity for intellectual development. His respect for the learned man is well illustrated in the following passage: 'A learned man is respected throughout the world, and only those who are learned can become great. He who is possessed of both worldly and heavenly knowledge is truly great; whereas the ignorant man is utterly worthless, being capricious, forgetful and easily deceived. Because of his ignorance, he frequently finds himself in miserable circumstances and easily succumbs to his enemies.'¹

Rāmdās had much to say about both reading and writing, and each disciple was expected to read the *Dāsboḍh* daily. Some of the disciples, among whom was Kalyāṇ, acted as scribes for the Svāmī, taking down his dictation or copying his rough notes. Those who have seen the writing of Kalyāṇ will testify to its beauty and symmetry. In one passage Rāmdās says: 'By working hard we should perfect our handwriting so that learned men may be pleased. The letters should be round or straight, clear-cut and easily discernible, with the lines running neatly, like rows of pearls. Every letter should be straight, with accurate spacing and a correct downward stroke. All curves or oblique lines should be distinct, and all the letters upon a given page should be similarly written. Each line should be separated from that above or below, the curves and strokes standing alone, and without having the long letters touch the line

¹ *Dāsboḍh*, ch. ix, sec. 4.

below.¹ From the foregoing it is clear that the Rāmdāsī sect held learning in high regard, and the various maṭhs exerted a definite intellectual influence, both among their inmates and their visitors.

Life in This World

Both as a Vedāntist and as a bhakta, Rāmdās held a pessimistic view about life in this world, and referred to it as a burden from which all sensible men should seek to escape. In the third chapter of the *Dāsbodh* he has left us a classic story of a man's life from birth to death, and, needless to say, it is a tale of unmitigated tragedy. Beginning with the description of the pain of childbirth, he skims over the early years of the lad's life and then enlarges on the unpleasant experiences the boy has in school, particularly the beatings he receives from the school teachers. After leaving school the boy marries at an early age, but shortly afterward he goes away and forgets all about his parents. The young wife dies, leaving the boy-husband sorrow-stricken, but he finally manages to forget his grief and marries again, this time linking his life to a woman who is unfaithful. Having accumulated household effects and equipment, he comes home one day to find that his goods have been stolen by a thief. Crushed in spirit by this adversity, he himself takes to committing misdemeanours, for which he is ultimately punished by a court of law. For many years he has been childless, but now children are born to him, and great is his joy, until he finds the expense intolerable. He goes into debt in order to have his children married, making it necessary for him to leave home again and seek to earn money in order to repay his debts. Alas! after returning a few years later, he finds that his wife and children have died of famine, and his journey has been useless. He marries a third time, but this wife proves to be a shrew, and after constant quarrels they decide to live apart, a quarrel over the estate being settled by the arbitration of his neighbours. The story ends when

¹ *Dāsbodh*, ch. xix, sec. 1.

an army invades the country and marches off with his wife, the husband later learning that she is dead.

In spite of this pessimistic viewpoint and of his references to the unpleasant features of human life, such as the three-fold misery (mental pain due to ourselves, accidental pain due to others, and pain due to supernatural causes), it is evident, from a study of his poetry, that he held some views of a more optimistic nature concerning life in general. With this thought in mind, Mr. Dev expresses the opinion that Rāmdās used the terms *samsāra* and *prapañch* with different connotations ; the former term denoting legitimate economic activities, and the latter implying unworthy attachments, such as love of pleasure or greed. Prof. Bhāte takes issue with Mr. Dev, maintaining that the two words are used interchangeably ; and it evidently is a question that only the grammarians can decide. Whether this be so or not, Rāmdās clearly repudiated the more extreme types of ascetic renunciation. Except for his use of the mystic syllable 'Om,' and his emphasis upon meditation and mental discipline, he had little in common with ascetic practices.¹ As he grew older, his sympathies leaned in the other direction and he came to have an increased appreciation for family, social, and political responsibilities. The fact that many married men and householders became his disciples is an indication that he did not scorn legitimate activities in connection with daily life.

Rāmdās laid out a daily programme in detail for his followers, and expected them to observe it faithfully. Unmarried disciples were to journey from place to place, begging their food as they went, getting acquainted with the spiritual needs of the people, and imparting spiritual knowledge to all who were ready to listen. Married disciples, with their household responsibilities, necessarily lived in a more circumscribed area and were generally busied with occupations which yielded them an income. In speaking of the round of daily duties, the Svāmī says, Although hard work causes fatigue, happiness is the

¹ *O.R.L.I.*, p. 132.

ultimate result. Laziness is the path to sadness, making a man unfit for manly effort, but when it is overcome, prosperity is attained in this world and happiness in the next. A man should arise in the morning, read a portion of Scripture and meditate on God. He should cleanse his mouth and take his morning bath. Whatever his daily task may be, he should perform it with care and diligence.¹ The Rāmdāsī programme will be discussed in Chapter IX, which deals with the Early Movement, in which we shall see that the Svāmī issued detailed instructions covering practically all of the daily activities of his disciples. In spite of his own vows of celibacy and of his pessimistic theology, he had a high regard for family life, as the following passage amply shows: 'Family life is the best possible life for any man. Such a man should faithfully carry out the six duties of learning, teaching, worshipping, conducting worship, giving alms, and receiving gifts, and he should practise all these rites according to the sacred precepts. He should be kind in speech, temperate in habit and unceasing in his devotion. Such a man spends himself freely in penance, observes vows faithfully, is ever diligent and makes God the central fact of his life.'²

Religious Activities

Rāmdās gave definite instructions concerning the various religious rites and practices, such as meditation, begging, kīrtan-singing, etc. He felt that begging was advisable, because it enabled Rāmdāsīs to see the people in their homes and observe their spiritual needs. The disciples accepted only what was sufficient for their one meal, after procuring which they returned to their headquarters and gave thanks to the idol. Rāmdās himself led such an active, austere life that laziness could not have been his motive in making the begging of alms one of the central activities of his movement. Rightly or wrongly, he felt that it was the best method for getting a close contact with the people; and for centuries it has been a common practice among Indian religious devotees.

¹ *Dāsboḍh*, ch. xi, sec. 3.

² *Ibid.*, ch. xiv, sec. 7.

Like his predecessors, Rāmdās used the musical service (kīrtan or bhajan) in giving religious instruction to the people. He taught that the kīrtan-singer should be an attractive individual, intelligent, devoted, and dressed in clean garments. His singing should be devotional, bringing peace and quiet to minds disturbed by quarrelling. The singer should be expert in composing metrical verses which would attract the attention of all listeners. Sincere kīrtan-singers do not attempt to amuse their hearers, but confine their efforts to teaching the difference between reality and unreality. Concerning kīrtan subjects Rāmdās says, 'Each successive kīrtan should have a new subject, the singer prostrating himself before the idol and proclaiming God's name by the clapping of hands. The fame of one idol should not be sung in front of another idol, and if there be no idol present, then Vedānta truths may be expounded. Repentance and renunciation should be taught to faithful worshippers, all trivial subjects, such as the beauty of women, being carefully excluded. The kīrtan should be so sung that the minds of all the people in the audience should be absorbed in the contemplation of God.'¹

Politics

In his later years Rāmdās had a good deal to say about social and political matters, his friendship with Śivājī having brought him into close relationship with public affairs. He was interested in the national movement of Śivājī, for both racial and religious reasons; taking great satisfaction in the fact that Śivājī's conquests were instrumental in spreading and reviving the Hindu faith. Indeed, it is probable that Rāmdās urged the Marāṭhā chieftain to enlarge his conquests because of their religious results. The first seven chapters of the *Dāśbodh* are practically silent concerning politics, but in later chapters he mentions the subject a number of times. In the eighteenth chapter, section six, he refers to the wickedness of the Muhammadans, and says that whatever success has been

¹ *Dāśbodh*, ch xiv, sec, 5.

achieved has been the gift of God. He urges his followers to perform courageous and righteous acts, to be loyal to Brahmans and gods, to be faithful in religious observances, and to seek earthly as well as heavenly happiness. Tradition says that this section was written after the death of Āfzul Khān; but the evidence for this is by no means conclusive. In another section the Svāmī gives a list of daily duties.¹ First, a Rāmdāsī should know about God and be able to teach spiritual truth; second, he should be wise in all matters pertaining to the state; third, he should be prudent in dealing with various other subjects; and, fourth, he should be industrious. In elaborating these thoughts he says that while one should engage in political activities, it should be done quietly, without giving offence to anyone, and all such activities should be performed in a humble, sympathetic and conciliatory spirit.

Sometimes the Svāmī's language seems ambiguous, but it was doubtless understood by his followers. 'One should not live permanently in one place, because this leads to familiarity and familiarity breeds contempt. A great deal of work is ruined by laziness, with the result that one loses the desire to develop associations. The thief should be made the treasurer, and if he commits a mistake he should be brought to see the error of his ways. Let a wicked man be placed before the wicked, or a garrulous man before the garrulous; but let him not become entangled in suspicions. A thorn should be removed by another thorn, without any occasion for quarrelling. The good man is he who works hard and keeps faith with others; hence let all work be properly completed. Since a great deal of work is ruined by lack of secrecy, political activities should be under the management of shrewd leaders who should take the work in hand and delegate various tasks to others. If we fear wicked people and therefore allow the secrecy governing political activities to be removed, the result will be unfortunate. We should know who the wicked people are, but should approach them

¹ *Dāsbodh*, ch. xi, sec. 5.

in a conciliatory spirit, refraining from giving them publicity, so that quarrelling may be minimized. Political activities should be carried out secretly and carefully, and associations, whenever possible, should be organized upon a basis of equality.¹ The above passages reveal the fact that Rāmdās entered heart and soul into the task of reviving Hindu religious interest in Mahārāshṭra. He commended the work of Śivājī in this regard, and evidently approved of the secret political activities which helped to free Mahārāshṭra from the Moslem yoke.

The Mahant and the Disciple

Rāmdās accepted the idea of the supreme importance of the guru (teacher) in the scheme of salvation, as emphasized in the educational sections of the Code of Manu.² According to this doctrine, it is almost impossible for anyone to achieve salvation without the guidance of a guru, who is to be venerated above all other men. Since he is the one who points the way, he must be a man of exemplary character, revealing in his own life all those qualities which need to be inculcated in the disciples. Said Rāmdās: 'There are gurus for all men, teaching the duties prescribed by caste or creed, but such men are not necessarily the best gurus (sadgurus). Parents are gurus; so also are the Brahmans, who teach the sacred Vedic mantras, but neither are they sadgurus. He who removes our ignorance by teaching us pure knowledge, explaining how we should restrain our senses, is the true sadguru. The chief qualities of such a man are that he should have great self-possession, power of concentration, and be able to teach the way of salvation. He must be free from passions, indifferent to worldly attractions and faithful in all religious duties. Above all, he must be able, when occasion demands, to celebrate a kīrtan and to explain Vedāntic truth, or teach other aspects of spiritual knowledge.'³

In describing the relationship between a guru and his

¹ *Dāsbodh*, ch. xix, sec. 9.

² *Hindu Ethics*, by Prof. John McKenzie, p. 49.

³ *Dāsbodh*, ch. v, sec. 2.

disciple, Rāmdās says: 'The disciple is useless without a guru, no matter how virtuous he may otherwise be, and a guru is of little use unless he has a disciple. If the guru should be an excellent man, but his disciple a man of unworthy character, then the relationship will not be fruitful. When, however, both guru and disciple have excellent qualities, then, by their united efforts, the quest for salvation leads to success.'¹ Disciples varied greatly in their qualities, some being much more virtuous than others. Rāmdās described a good disciple thus: 'The chief characteristic of a good disciple is that he must have complete faith in the teaching of his guru and obey him in all respects. He must be noble-minded, patient, steadfast in the search for salvation, kind-hearted, free from envy or jealousy, pure in thought, discriminating, intelligent, affectionate, and noble in deportment.'² It is probable that many of his disciples failed to reach the high standard here set forth; nevertheless, from the very first, the Rāmdāsī movement has produced men and women of sterling character.

An evil disciple was characterized thus: 'He is an evil disciple who is indolent, of a complaining disposition, or conceited because of his learning. Although trusting others for a time, he later becomes suspicious. In his heart are evil desires, anger, pride, jealousy, greed, ignorance, passion, conceit, and contempt for others. Such a disciple is dilatory, ungrateful, sinful, suspicious, incredulous, faithless, unbelieving, irritable, cruel, merciless, lazy, thoughtless, impatient and unscrupulous.'³

Miscellaneous

Rāmdās accepted the institution of caste, believing that it was a useful method of community arrangement, and an element of stability in Hindu society. He considered the Brahmans to be the spiritual leaders of the community, entitled to a position of special privilege, and taught that the Brahmans should receive the homage of all the other

¹ *Dāsbodh*, ch. v, sec. 3.

² *Ibid.*, ch. v, sec. 3.

³ *Ibid.*, ch. v, sec. 3.

members of the social group. Although most of his disciples, perhaps, were Brahmans, a number did not belong to that group ; and he was not in any sense a slave to the caste system, being willing to break it when need arose. In a number of instances he rebuked orthodox Brahmans for their caste prejudices. Another interesting characteristic was his high respect for women, two of whom were members of the intimate group of disciples who were admitted to his confidence and whom he trusted implicitly. Even to-day a large number of women attend his anniversary ceremonies. Rāmdās made many allusions to poetry, and in the fourteenth chapter of the *Dāsbodh* he described the characteristics of Marāṭhī poetry. Quite a few of his disciples were poets in their own right, and the art of writing poetry was one of the chief subjects taught in the various Rāmdāsī maṭhs.

CHAPTER VII

THE PLACE OF RĀMDĀS IN HISTORY

HIS RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE

IN the religious sphere, Rāmdās is chiefly noted to-day for his share in establishing what has been called a national religion (Mahārāshṭra Dharma). The Rāmdāsī movement as such was a spiritual revival, even though it did not catch the popular imagination to the extent that the Paṇḍharpūr movement did; and it possessed certain reactionary influences in favour of Brahmanism. In this sense it was not simply a reform movement, but a partial reassertion of the best in orthodox Hinduism. In recent numbers of the magazine, *Rāmdās and Rāmdāsī*, published at Dhulia, there have been a series of articles, entitled 'Mahārāshṭra Dharma,' in which the author has tried to show that the national movement of Śivājī had religious implications, political and religious motives going hand in hand, and that in this task Śivājī was aided by Rāmdās, as well as by a number of other poets.¹ The author divides the people of that time into two groups, the Mahārāshṭra Samāj and the Non-Mahārāshṭra Samāj, maintaining that the former group was that which loyally supported Śivājī in his effort to drive out the invader. Mr. Rājwāde takes somewhat the same position in an article entitled, 'The Object, Form and Origin of the Sampradāya,' in which he describes in detail the motives with which Rāmdās established his movement.² He says that the Svāmī's chief purpose was to liberate the Marāṭhā people from their spiritual indifference. He asserts that Rāmdās deliberately worked among the Hindus

¹ *Rāmdās and Rāmdāsī* (Magazine), Nos. 85, 86, 87, etc., 1925-26.

² *V.V.*, Vol. 1, sec. 44.

of higher castes because he felt that the regeneration of Hinduism was in their hands, as they had accepted the authority of the Hindu scriptures and the institution of caste. As a believer in the Vedānta philosophy, Rāmdās threw his influence in favour of the orthodox beliefs, and emphasized the traditional views about salvation. Besides the above writers, there are a number of other Brahman authors to-day who emphasize the fact that the Rāmdāsī sect was a defence of the old path, rather than a reform movement. In doing this, they are tempted to ignore the bhakti element in his movement, and the emphasis which he gave to spiritual living as opposed to external observances. Again and again he asserted that the chief purpose of religion was to maintain a quality of living. He criticized the Brahmans because they had been false to their religious traditions. A number of learned men, proud of their knowledge, became his disciples only after passing through humiliating experiences. It is true that he did not break with orthodox Hinduism; but in this he was following in the footsteps of men like Dnyāneśvar and Nāmdev. It is also true that he was not such a thoroughgoing bhakta as Tukārām, but also emphasized Vedāntic monism.

From the bhakti standpoint, Rāmdās helped to popularize the worship of Rāma in Mahārāṣṭra, in much the same way that Tulsī Dās did it in northern India. No one can read his poems addressed to Rāma without feeling that he had caught the bhakti spirit and that his whole life was wrapped up in adoration of this particular god. Just as Tukārām sang the praises of Viṭhobā, so Rāmdās spent hours each day in the worship of Śrī Rāma; in addition to which, he established a number of shrines and temples. After deciding to give his life to Rāma and making his vows, he took the name Rām-dās, or servant of Rāma. Undoubtedly it was the bhakti element in his movement which gave life and warmth to it, which it never could have had as a mere organization or as an exponent of the Vedānta. But after all is said and done, it must be frankly admitted that the Svāmī made no organized attempt to harmonize bhakti with his monistic philosophy. In recognizing this frankly, we need to remember his

background, training and contemporaries, together with the many precedents which he had to follow. If any distinction can be drawn, it would seem that in his early years his Vedāntic views loomed larger, but that as his life-work developed, the bhakti element became more pronounced on the one hand, and his interest in worldly affairs more positive on the other. Being a man of practical turn of mind and shrewd common sense, he responded to the influences about him, seeking to give them a more adequate spiritual tone. To sum up, it is clear that he was a great spiritual influence in his day, giving counsel to the ruling classes, spiritual encouragement to Brahmans, and guidance to Vedāntists and devotees of Rāma, many of whom became his followers.

HIS SOCIAL INFLUENCE

On the whole Rāmdās supported the existing social order, although he felt free to criticize it, where criticism was due. Himself a celibate, with many unmarried followers, he did not condemn those in the married state; and as a result a large number of Rāmdāsīs have been, and still are, married. He made no attempt to uproot the caste system, but he did not hesitate to enroll non-Brahmans among his followers. His disciple Jairām had been previously excommunicated by Brahmans because his (Jairām's) former guru had a low-caste wife. There is no evidence to show that Rāmdās was partial to his Brahman disciples as opposed to his Kshatriya or Marāṭhā disciples. There were two noteworthy aspects in regard to his influence: first, he helped to purify social relationships; and, secondly, he developed a sense of social solidarity. He looked upon caste as a social opportunity rather than as a mere mechanical contrivance for creating social distinctions. Each caste had a work to perform and a responsibility toward the whole community. In the spiritual fellowship of his movement, members of the higher castes acquired a common conviction and purpose, proud of their Hindu loyalty, and conscious of their social heritage in contrast to the Moslems about them. In this task of Hindu social regeneration,

therefore, he had a definite share, although it cannot be said that he was in any sense a social reformer. His influence was toward stability rather than toward change.

HIS POLITICAL INFLUENCE

Indirectly, as Mr. Justice Ranade has pointed out, all the Marāṭhā poet-saints had a share in the upbuilding of the Marāṭhā nation. The bhakti movement was democratic, caste distinctions being levelled and all worshippers having direct access to God. The ground was thus prepared for the new Marāṭhā nation, in which all loyal Hindus had a share, including even the despised outcaste. In fostering the worship of Rāma, the Svāmī had a considerable share in this work of preparation. In addition to this, he wielded a wide influence through his friendship with Śivājī and other officials, as was pointed out in Chapter III. Great as this was, however, it was generally subordinated to the spiritual emphasis; and the present effort on the part of certain writers to magnify his political contribution is not supported by the evidence. It was the *religion* of Mahārāshṭra that weighed most heavily upon him, and he looked upon Śivājī's conquests as a golden opportunity to extend the influence of the Hindu faith, particularly those aspects of it which he was actively propagating. In the later years, both Śivājī and his son, Sambhājī, came to the Svāmī whenever they were oppressed by the burdens of state, finding his sane, wholesome advice a great comfort in their perplexity. It is also probable that many of Śivājī's official edicts and public acts were more in harmony with religious requirements, because of the Svāmī's influence, than they otherwise might have been.

AS A POET

Much of his poetry was written in the *ovī* metre, but it must be confessed that Rāmdās seems to have been indifferent to poetical form in his own writings. In the sense of polish, style, imagery and finish, he is not perhaps in the front rank of Marāṭhī poets, his fame resting upon the

substance of his verses rather than upon the rhythm or beauty of expression. He did not write a great deal in the abhaṅg metre, as Tukārām did, and to that extent may have been handicapped, because this particular metre is easily memorized and readily becomes popular. Yet he could, when occasion arose, produce poetry of a high lyrical quality, like the Verses to the Mind. During his lifetime he used a number of metres, other than the oṽī, showing that he was master of the art of writing poetry, even though he leaned toward the more prosaic oṽī metre, and these other metres included *bhujāṅgaprayāta*, long and short abhaṅgs, *pramāṇikā*, *anushtubh*, *mālinī* and *chāmara*. In using this variety of metres, Rāmdās doubtless accepted the principle of adapting the metre to fit the theme, and his extensive use of the oṽī metre was probably because he felt that it was peculiarly suited to didactic poetry. The two hundred and five Verses to the Mind are generally considered to be his poetical gem, and are memorized by countless Hindus, although many of the *Karuṇāśṭake* are also beautiful in their wealth of imagery. The Svāmī had a wide vocabulary, using many Sanskrit words, which had doubtless become familiar through his study of the Hindu scriptures. He left one poem in Sanskrit, but the rest were in Marāṭhī, and his poetry is not so difficult but that a reader of fair intelligence can understand it. He used familiar illustrations and there is a human element in his poetry which, in the bhakti verses, becomes highly emotional. In short, while he was capable of rising to great heights, and has left us a number of poetical gems, his chief contribution is his teaching of Vedāntic truth through the medium of the vernacular, his making the worship of Rāma popular, and his emphasis upon high ethical standards.

AS A TEACHER AND THINKER

In the opinion of Prof. D. V. Potdār, of Poona, Rāmdās was one of the greatest thinkers that Mahārāshṭra has produced, standing head and shoulders over any of his disciples; a fact which seems to be borne out by the gradual disintegration of the Rāmdāsī sect. A study

of his verses shows that his mind was alert, keen and comprehensive. With a thorough grasp of Vedāntic doctrines, he evidently was familiar with many of the Hindu sacred scriptures, including the *Gītā*, *Dnyāneśvarī* and *Upanishads*. Added to his years of study were the years of travel and observation, in which he came to have a thorough knowledge of human nature and of the general situation in the country. By means of this splendid background, he was able to give to his movement an intellectual quality that was almost unique. Courses of study became one of the primary activities in each math, including reading, writing, singing, poetry, and a thorough study of the Hindu scriptures, especially the *Dāsabodh*. This developed a group of disciples who became notable poets and teachers in their own right. It is also one of the reasons why the Brahmans have always been active in the movement, regarding it somewhat as a movement of their own, although this hardly seems justified. Rāmdās showed his great mental capacity not only by his ability to master abstruse Hindu philosophy, but also by his capacity to reduce this philosophy to simple terms and teach it, through the medium of Marāṭhī, to men and women of average intelligence.

AS A SAINT

The Svāmī could never have achieved the results which he did, in organizing such an elaborate movement, unless he had been possessed of remarkable qualities which lifted his personality far above the ordinary. As the organizer and inspiration of a sect which has been influential in Mahārāshṭra from that day to this, his work speaks for itself. He had the qualities of successful leadership, although it was a leadership on the Indian pattern rather than the type which is familiar in the West. He could be kindly or strict, lenient or unbending, as occasion required. Even after his movement had assumed large proportions, it still depended almost entirely upon his personal judgment. It was a one-man movement, in the sense that his thousands of followers looked to him personally rather than to any system or

routine. With his quiet dignity, self-control and meditative air, he was a familiar figure to all his disciples, who had high respect for his unflagging zeal. His rapidity of travel and dislike for crowds or the settled ways of living were entirely compatible with his nature. Although a recluse by preference, his affectionate disposition made it natural for him to mingle with others at frequent intervals, and disciples flocked to his side. There must have been something magnetic about him which attracted others to him, resulting first in discipleship and later in a relationship of personal affection. In no other way can we explain the seeming ease with which he enrolled followers in his movement, or the rapidity with which it spread over Mahārāshṭra. His letters testify to the love which he had for his disciples, and show that they were bound to him by ties of personal affection. Occasionally we catch a glimpse of his sense of humour or his delight in sharing in children's pranks. Giridhar tells how Rāmdās once asked Jairām, who was very fat, to approach him by a narrow path which proved to be impossible, and the inference is that the Svāmī chuckled when he issued the instructions.¹ The traditional accounts narrate a number of instances when the finger of scandal was pointed at him; but these efforts were never successful, as his character was above reproach. No one can make a study of the life of Rāmdās without coming to feel that here indeed was a man of genuine, saintly character who 'lived his message' day by day.

CRITICISMS

It is the unpleasant task of the historian, who interprets the events he records, to express adverse criticism when such seems to be required, just as it is the historian's privilege to give praise wherever it is due. In the writer's judgment, there are several particulars in which the character of Rāmdās failed to rise to the greatest heights. Together with many of his predecessors, he taught both Vedānta doctrines and the worship of Rāma, and in attempting to hold both

¹ *Pratāp*, ch. xviii, p. 130, v. 47.

positions his teaching lacked consistency, as has been already stated. He does not seem to have been a creative thinker, in the main; revealing neither the independent *theological* thinking of Rāmānuja nor the radical *social* views of Kabīr. Again, as an organizer, he failed to give his movement the solidity necessary in order that it should continue unimpaired under mediocre leadership; though of course this may have been an impossible task. The fact that it was so much a *personal* movement proved eventually to be a weakness, resulting in gradual dissolution. Another defect may have been that his sect lacked an aggressive programme, which might have saved it from disintegration in spite of its deficient organization. It has had a tendency to become self-centred, lacking the enthusiasm or democratic phases of the Paṇḍharpūr movement. In a sense, the Brahman influence has been an exclusive one, with the result that the movement has not been fully representative of all the higher castes. But while recognizing these limitations, we needs must acknowledge his greatness as a poet, student, organizer and saint. It is as a religious teacher and the preceptor of Śivājī, however, that his name will best be known to succeeding generations in Mahārāshṭra.

CHAPTER VIII

LITERATURE OF THE MOVEMENT

THE PUBLISHED POETRY OF RĀMDĀS

THE outstanding poetical writing of Rāmdās is the *Dāsboḍh*, sometimes called the 'Granthrāj' or the 'Granth Sāheb,' a work of twenty chapters of ten sections each, with a total of 7,752 verses. There is considerable repetition in it, some phrases being repeated word for word; and the spelling in the Dhulia edition is inconsistent, showing that the copying was done by a number of different disciples.¹ The first seven chapters were probably written between the years A.D. 1554 and 1564, additional chapters being written as need arose. It is written in ovī metre, as has been already stated, and the poem is in the form of a dialogue between a pupil and his preceptor. It contains a good deal of ethical instruction, references to social and political duties, sound advice for mahants and disciples, and general spiritual teachings. The word *rājakāraṇ*² appears only twenty-two times in the whole book, there being but one reference in the first eight chapters; hence it is clearly not a book devoted primarily to political interests, as some enthusiastic Rāmdāsīs would have us believe. The fifth section of the eleventh chapter is one of the few sections which is particularly concerned with duties to the state.

Up to the present date, at least seven old manuscripts of the *Dāsboḍh* have been discovered.³ (1) One copy, completed by Jairām Svāmī in A.D. 1693, is in Dhulia. (2) There is a copy which was written by Keshav Svāmī, of the Umbraj

¹ Āltekār, Introduction, p. 20.

² *Rājakāraṇ* means 'duties to the state' or 'statecraft.'

³ *V.V.*, Vol. 1, sec. 49.

maṭh, in 1698. (3) Another manuscript was discovered in the Umbraj maṭh, which was written in A.D. 1702. (4) A copy found at Domgāon, the property of Dattātraya Buva, was written by Mudgal Svāmī in A.D. 1698. (5) A manuscript, written in A.D. 1694 by order of Diṅkar Svāmī, of the Tisgāon maṭh, has been found at Kāḍegāon in the Ahmednagar district. (6) There is a copy which was written in A.D. 1714 by a certain Govind of Kalyān's maṭh, and is now in the possession of the Dhulia Sabhā. (7) A copy has very recently been discovered, which was written in 1684, three years after the Svāmī's death, and is now being published. When one realizes how great is the reverence of all Rāmdāsīs for the *Dāsbodh*, it will readily be seen that the discovery and publication of these old manuscripts is a matter of the first importance to the followers of the great Saint. The first edition of the *Dāsbodh* was brought out by Mr. S. S. Dev in A.D. 1905, at Dhulia, and since that time there have been a number of other editions, making a total sale to date of about 9,000 copies.¹ The ovī metre, in which it is written, has four lines, as a rule; the first three lines of about eight syllables each, and the last line somewhat shorter. Although the first three lines generally end in syllables that rhyme, this form of poetic diction is not well adapted for singing.

The *Śrī Śloka Manāche* is a collection of two hundred and five verses which give advice to the mind.² These verses are particularly musical, and the disciples repeat them as they journey from place to place or while begging alms. One disciple repeats a verse and the other disciples repeat it in unison after him. The *bhujāṅgaprayāta* metre, in which it is written, has four lines of twelve syllables each, all the lines being in rhyme, and there are four equal groups of syllables in each line, the emphasis generally being upon the middle syllable in each group. The verses are very popular, being memorized by many educated Hindus, and they cover a wide variety of topics, such as

¹ Ālṭekar, see Introduction, pp. 17-18.

² See Introduction to *Manāche Śloka*, Rāmdāsī Series, published at Dhulia.

devotion to Rāma, attaining self-control, renunciation, kindness, doing one's duty, conquering sin, keeping company with good persons, meditating upon Brahman, following the teachings of the guru, and obtaining release.

The verses asking for God's mercy, called *Karuṇāśhṭake* (collections of eight), belong to another well-known group of the Svāmī's poetry. Mr. Dev says that no one knows where the name came from, since the poems were not discovered until 1818, not being mentioned by Giridhar, Mahīpati, Uddhav Suta or Hanumant.¹ These verses, which contain confessions of sin and expressions of the desire for repentance, are used by Rāmdāsīs in connection with the evening worship. Like the Verses to the Mind, they are written in the *bhujāṅga-prayāta* metre, and the Dhulia publication was taken from the manuscript copied by Kalyāṇ, written in his beautiful handwriting. Mr. Dev has another manuscript in his possession, which differs somewhat in the text, and it may have been written by Vāsudev Paṇḍit, of the Kanheri maṭh. Among the topics discussed in these verses are the qualities of Rāma and Kṛishṇa, ascetics, pride, daily worship, salvation, the Rāmdāsī sect, and worldliness.

Rāmdās put into Marāṭhī verse (*bhujāṅga-prayāta* metre) two chapters called the 'Sundarkāṇḍ' and the 'Yuddhakāṇḍ,' which, with a third chapter entitled 'Kīśkindhākāṇḍ,' are known as Rāmdās's *Rāmāyaṇa*. Mr. Dev submits the following reasons in the endeavour to show that the third chapter was not from the Svāmī's pen:—² (1) No copy is to be found in any of the chief maṭhs, such as Jāmb, Chāphaḷ, Sajjaṅgaḍ, etc. (2) In the 119th abhaṅg of his *Life of Rāmdās*, Bhīmasvāmī Śīrgāvkar says, 'Rāmdās, desiring to write the story of Rāma, composed 100 verses, called the Sundarkāṇḍ, and 1,300 verses, called the Yuddhakāṇḍ, thus completing 1,400 verses, by the repetition of which all sins disappear.' (3) The book of miscellaneous poems in Kalyāṇ's handwriting contains only the two chapters. In view of the above reasons, Mr. Dev concludes that Rāmdās

¹ Introduction to *Karuṇāśhṭake*, p. 1.

² Introduction to *Rāmdāsāñchī Kavītā*, Rāmdāsī Series, published at Dhulia.

purposely wrote two chapters only, and passed over five of the chapters in the Sanskrit work, because he wished to impress upon the disciples that phase of Rāma's life in which he came upon earth to liberate the gods who were harassed by the demon king, Rāvaṇa. Rāmdās has also written upon this theme in his poem called the *Laghu Rāmāyaṇa*. While the Svāmī's *Rāmāyaṇa* is chiefly concerned with biographical material, there are numerous digressions, in which such topics are discussed as duties to the state, social reform, and devotion to Rāma.

Rāmdās wrote a group of abhaṅgs, called 'śatakas,' concerning such subjects as renunciation, knowledge and advice.¹ Another group, called 'pañchkas,' dealt with such matters as devotion, foolishness, pride, laziness, repentance, thoughtfulness, beauty, intoxication, renunciation, truthfulness, vanity and friendliness.² The *Junā Dāsbodh* is a poem of twenty-one chapters in ovī metre, supposed to have been written before the *Dāsbodh*, and possibly to have been the basis for the latter work. It is concerned with Vedāntic teaching in part, but more with the practical religious duties of everyday life, such as renunciation, effort, good discipleship, teaching and mental peace. Rāmdās wrote a poem entitled, *Ṣadriṣu Vivechan*, or 'the description of the six enemies,' and this is in the anushtubh metre which has four lines of eight syllables each; these enemies being passion, pride, hypocrisy, anger, jealousy and worldliness.

The Svāmī composed thirteen hymns, also in the anushtubh metre, in praise of Mārutī; and they are called *Bhīmarūpī Stotre*. They tell of Mārutī's mother, of his anger, of his service to Rāma, of his small form but quick pace, and of his dreadful power. Another poem in the ovī metre, called *Aurvayavyatirek*, discusses the creation and the destruction of the world according to the ancient classical formulæ of assertion and negation. There is a poem called the *Nityanaimittika Vidhīsaṅgraha Sopāna*, which deals with the various religious rites which

¹ Collections of one hundred verses each.

² Collections of five verses each.

are to be performed daily or occasionally. There is also the group called *Bhupālī*, or prayers to be sung in the morning, which are thoughts in contemplation of the *Saguṇa* God and the *Nirguṇa* God.¹ There are a number of poems devoted to the worship with the lamps (*āratī*), and also a group dedicated to Brahman, the ultimate and only Reality. There are poems to be sung on specified days, and others to be repeated while circling the temple. In connection with the Rāmanavamī Festival, there are special poems to be used for that occasion only, from the opening of the doors and offerings to the idols, to the car procession the evening of the eleventh day. There are religious verses to be sung in connection with the nine kinds of devotion, the care of a child, the carrying of a torch, and the wandering of ascetics. The only Sanskrit poem known to be written by the Svāmī is called the *Dās-Gītā*, and it is not of great importance.

The last group of the published poetry of Rāmdās includes a large number of miscellaneous poems, which cover a wide variety of topics, some having autobiographical value. There is the song of the Chāphaḷ Festival, a poem concerning royal duties, one describing the duties of a Kshatriya and a servant, a letter to his mother and two letters to his elder brother, two poems about building activities, and one about gardens. There is an abhaṅg concerning Viṭhobā, and another in praise of Mārutī, the latter in the *mālinī* metre. Other letters which have come down to us include those to Uddhav Gosāvī, one to his nephew, and one to Sambhājī after he became king. Verses of advice to Śivājī and ślokas concerning the Rāma mantra are important. One short poem, addressed to Śrī Rāma, entitled 'Lameness,' has been singled out by Mr. Dev for special study.² Another poem was found among the waste papers in the Āpchand maṭh of Śivrām Svāmī, Kalyāṇ's disciple, in which Rāmdās compares himself to a washerman whose business it is to wash the minds of those who have not learned renunciation.³ There are

¹ The idol having qualities and Brahman the unknowable.

² *V.V.*, Vol. II, sec. 70.

³ *V.V.*, Vol. II, sec. 80.

also about twenty-five other poems in this miscellaneous group concerning various topics, which bear witness to the remarkable breadth of interest which Rāmdās had.

THE UNPUBLISHED POETRY OF RĀMDĀS

Mr. S. S. Dev estimates that there are about one thousand pages of the Svāmī's known poetical works still unpublished, a large part of it written by Kalyāṇ Svāmī.¹ There are nine poems, of one hundred verses each, concerning a variety of topics, such as the nine kinds of devotion, the four *muktis*, the five destructions, reality, Brahman, the sadguru, worldly life, initiative, children's play, and Śrī Rāma. Another group is a collection of miscellaneous abhaṅgs which are chiefly concerned with spiritual experience and the path to God. There is a group of verses, called *Pañchikaraṇa Yoga*, which tell of the resemblance between the human body and the universe, describing the nature of *Nirguṇa* and of *Ātmanivedan*.² There is a poem, called the *Chaturtha Yogāman*,³ which describes the nature of the internal soul within the human body, eulogizing the eternal Brahman and the value of knowledge coupled with experience. In the group of verses called *Manapañchaka*, Rāmdās describes the kingdom of Śrī Rāma, telling of the joy found in the service of Rāma, and says that by serving our fellowmen heaven can be easily attained. The poem called *Pañchaman* refers to the *Dāsboḍh* and tells of the relationship between the teacher and the disciple. There is a group of poems in the anushtubh metre, concerning varied subjects, which have genuine value for the student of religion. There are hundreds of poems about God's mercy, which have a peculiarly appealing quality and quickly win their way to the heart of the worshipper. This completes the outline of the known works by the Svāmī; and it is undoubtedly a stupendous output, when one considers the active life

¹ See Introduction to *Don Charitre*, p. 21, Rāmdāsī Series, published at Dhulia.

² (a) The state of being without qualities. (b) The offering of the self to God.

which he led. It is possible that other poems by the Svāmī may still be found, hidden away in an obscure math or carefully concealed in a family strong-box; and it is also possible that some of the poems attributed to Rāmdās were produced by disciples; but this is not likely to any large extent. Many of the unpublished poems are with Mr. Dev at Dhulia, who is publishing them little by little, as opportunity offers.

THE POETRY OF THE DISCIPLES

There were a number of Rāmdāsīs who later became famous in their own right, and in a sense, therefore, their poetry cannot strictly be classified as Rāmdāsī poetry. This list would include Vāman Paṇḍit and Raṅganāth Svāmī.¹ Furthermore, a number of the original disciples undoubtedly wrote works that have never been found. Antāji's diary says that Uddhav wrote in detail about the Svāmī's twelve years of pilgrimage; Bājipant wrote about the choosing of the early disciples; Venābāi wrote about the eleven Mārutīs established by Rāmdās; a chapter in *Śiva Chatrapati* told of Śivāji becoming a disciple; Bājipant told of the six weeks' visit of Śivāji to Sajjaṅgaḍ; Trimbak Gosāvī described the deaths of Śreshṭh and his wife, Parbatī; and Divākar wrote about the conversations which Rāmdās had with others during his later years.² It may be that this was a literary plan arranged by the disciples, which remained unfulfilled; or it may be that most of these records were actually written, some to be eventually discovered, and others to be lost.

In his introduction to *Don Charitre*, Mr. Dev gives a list of twenty-three disciples and mentions their literary productions, many of which are referred to in Chapter II. Of the first eight, Mr. Dev says that Bhīmāji Śahāpurkar was the only one to leave a biography, and this work, therefore, has great value as an original source; but, unfortunately, it is rather brief and fragmentary. A work

¹ Keluskar, p. 515.

² *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 21.

not mentioned in Chapter II was a biography of Rāmdās written in 1708 by a certain Kulkarnī, of Śāhāpur, which has not yet been published. There is an unpublished biography by Gaṅgādhar Mahārāj, written in 1718, and a brief biography of about forty pages written in 1723 by an unknown writer, which also is unpublished. Meru Svāmī wrote a biography; and in 1798 a work was written by Lakṣmaṇ Buva, entitled *Śrī Sadgurustavarāj*. There was a biography written in 1876 by Gaṅgādhar Buva, and one in 1882 by G. N. Khānvalkar; all of the above-mentioned works being in manuscript form only.

There are a large number of letters written by the original disciples, which have been found here and there, many of which have now been published.¹ In addition to these letters, there are numerous land-grants and other Government documents which give information about the Rāmdāsī sect, and which therefore have value for the student. There are a number of songs which are of Rāmdāsī origin and which concern the life or the teachings of the great Svāmī. Mr. Rājwāde describes one such song, which is sung by the women and girls at Paraḷī during the worship of Rāma.² For many years Mr. Dev has made a systematic search of Rāmdāsī maṭhs, temples, homes of descendants, and libraries; with the result that at Dhulia there are now hundreds of these manuscripts filed away. As he finds time, Mr. Dev is studying them and publishing the results of his research; and it is not too much to say that the Rāmdāsī movement is unique in the thoroughness with which its literature has been investigated.

Śreṣhṭh, the Svāmī's brother, was a poet of considerable ability and spent most of his life at Jāmb, where Rāmdās was born. He wrote two works, called *Bhakti Rahasya* and *Sugamoṇḍāya*, in addition to which he composed many miscellaneous poems, all of which have been published at Dhulia. Another important poetical work is the *Svānubhava Diṅkar*, which was written by Diṅkar Svāmī, of the Tīsgaon maṭh, near Ahmednagar, who was a dis-

¹ *Śrīsampradāyācī Kāgadpatre*, Parts I and II.

² *V.V.*, Vol. II, sec. 72.

ciple of Rāmdās. It tells how the guru should be worshipped and his favour obtained; covering such topics as meditation, renunciation, good deeds, devotion, knowledge, Brahman, yoga, worldly life, giving kīrtans, and māyā. Dīnkar also wrote a poem called *Bhagvat*, and it is said that he was greatly influenced by the poetry of Śreshṭh, having more contact with him, perhaps, than with his more famous brother.¹

In the opinion of Mr. S. K. Ālṭekar, one poem, generally attributed to Rāmdās, was really written, by a certain Haṁsarāj Svāmī; his reason being that at the end of each chapter it is stated that this is the substance of Rāmdās Svāmī, the title 'Śrī Rāmdās' being attached to the beginning, which is a title never assumed by the Svāmī himself.² Uddhav combined poetical ability with his other qualities and inspired poetical activity among his own group of disciples. At his Ṭākerlī maṭh forty-three bundles of manuscripts were found, among them a few poems by Rāmdās himself.³ One of Uddhav's poems was found in the Indore Bodhan maṭh, and tells of the disciple Śivrām, who spent a few days with Rāmdās and then was sent to the Talaṅgāon province to liberate the people,⁴ an episode to which Giridhar also refers.⁵ Śivrām wrote about twenty poems, concerning such subjects as bad company, death, the sadguru, worship of Rāma, the sports of Kṛishṇa, dancing and singing. From a study of his poetry it seems that Śivrām had an incurable physical malady.

In the Ṭākerlī maṭh poems were found which were written by three disciples of Rāmdās, named Devadās, Nirañjan and Musalrām. The maṭh of Devadās was at Dādegāon, near Ahmednagar, and his poems are considered to be almost as good as those of Rāmdās. In the Ṭākerlī maṭh there was also found a short biography of the Svāmī, written by Moro Bhagvat Sabnīs, of Sajjaṅgaḍ, in 1789. Another disciple of Rāmdās, Ānnāppā, of the Nilaṅge maṭh in the Bālāghaṭ Province, wrote a poem of fourteen

¹ See Introduction to *Svānubhava Dīnkar*, Rāmdāsī Series, of Dhulīa, p. 11. ² Ālṭekar, p. 32. ³ *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 38.

⁴ *V.V.*, Vol. II, sec. 83.

⁵ *Pratāp*, ch. x, sec. 69.

verses, called the *Pādukākhyaṇ*, describing details of his own life.¹ He wrote a poem in which he included a few of the poems by Rāmdās, and he wrote also a copy of the *Dāsbodh*, in which his handwriting resembles that of Kalyāṇ. Another inmate of the same maṭh, named Jaivant, wrote poetry in Marāṭhī, Hindustānī and Kanarese, and may have been a disciple of Ānnāppā. A poem called *Santamālīkā* was written by Jairām Suta, who was a disciple of the Svāmī; and a work called *Sītāsvayaṃvar* was written by the female disciple Venābāī. Giridhar, the author of the *Samarthapratāp*, was one of the most prolific writers in the Rāmdāsī movement, and is said to have produced forty different works, only two of which have been published, the rest being at Dhulia in manuscript form.² Near the village of Bhalkī there is a maṭh which was established by Nursobā, who was a disciple of Ātmarām Mahārāj, the author of the Svāmī's biography entitled *Dāsa Viśrāmdhāma*. Nursobā wrote a large number of abhaṅgs, a hundred and fifty-six of which are available.³ This list of Rāmdāsī poetry is very incomplete, and is being added to yearly by the patient scholarship of Mr. S. S. Dev, who is editing the various manuscripts, and who will, we hope, eventually write a substantial essay upon this subject.

WHO WROTE THE 'DĀSBODH'?

In the January and February numbers of the Marāṭhī magazine, *Vividhnyānvistār*, in the year 1921, Mr. Bhayyaśāstrī Jāmkhedkar wrote two articles, in which he asserted that Rāmdās was not the author of the *Dāsbodh*, but that the latter work had been written by one of the disciples; and he gave a number of reasons for supporting this position. His articles were answered by Mr. G. S. Āltekar, of Karād, in the *Chitramāyajagāt*, in the year 1921, and by his father, Mr. S. K. Āltekar, in a lecture delivered in Ahmednagar in 1924. The following points are raised and answered one by one: (1) It is customary for a poet to mention the name of his deity, parents and himself in his written work, and since Rāmdās neglected to do this, he could not have written the *Dāsbodh*. Answer: There are several verses that do mention Dās or Rāmdās, such as 8-9-60; 11-7-22; 12-4-20;

¹ *V.V.*, Vol. II, sec. 76.

² *Dnyānodaya*, Jan. 2, 1921, 'Notes on Marāṭhī Saints,' by Dr. J. E. Abbott.

³ *V.V.*, Vol. II, sec. 78.

16-1-21; and other verses which mention the deity, such as 16-1-21. (2) Why is the poem called *Dāsbodh* instead of *Rāmdāsbodh*, and why are the words 'Dās says' so rarely found? Answer: These words do occur in some verses, and are not used oftener because the ovi metre is not well adapted for them. *Rāmdās* calls himself the servant of *Rāma* and prefers to be known by that title. (3) *Rāmdās* was not a poet and had not studied the *Śāstras*, or he would not have repeated himself so often, the *Dāsbodh* repeating much that was given in miscellaneous poems. Answer: *Rāmdās* calls himself a poet in a number of verses, and in the *Dāsbodh* discusses many themes not touched upon in the miscellaneous poems, such as statecraft, renunciation, release and theories of creation. *Rāmdās* himself referred to the *Granthrāj* in a chapter called *Ānandbhuvan*, and it is entirely possible that many miscellaneous poems were written after the *Dāsbodh*. (4) Why is the worship of *Rāma* neglected in the *Dāsbodh*? Answer: Although there are many verses which teach the worship of *Rāma*, yet it is pre-eminently a work of spiritual knowledge, and therefore it does not stress the worship of *Rāma*. (5) The short biography by *Diṅkar* does not mention that *Rāmdās* wrote the *Dāsbodh*. Answer: The work by *Diṅkar* does not pretend to be a complete biography, and other biographies of value do mention the *Svāmī's* authorship. (6) Why has no copy of the *Dāsbodh* been found which was written during the life of *Rāmdās*? Answer: Very few other manuscripts of the *Svāmī's* lifetime have been found; but this is not surprising when we consider the wars and upheavals which have taken place, resulting in the loss of many Government documents as well. (7) Mr. Dev asserts in his preface that *Rāmdās* made many corrections in the original copy of the *Dāsbodh*, but there is no proof for this. Answer: There is an old manuscript in the *Domgāon* math in which corrections have been made, probably in the handwriting of *Kalyān*; and another copy at *Nilāṅge*, in *Ānnāppā's* handwriting, shows that corrections were made. (8) The *Dāsbodh* fails to observe the usual custom of asking God's blessing at the beginning of a work. Answer: There are three ways to invoke benedictions, one of which is to describe the contents, and the *Dāsbodh* has followed this last method, both *Kālidāsa* and *Vālmīki* also using this same form. (9) Verse 5-3-40 says that he who thinks God greater than the *sadguru* is a wretch, and *Rāmdās* could not have written so disrespectfully of *Śrī Rāma*. Answer: This is poetic exaggeration, and many other poets have described the *sadguru* in the same way. (10) In Chapter vii, section 10, it is written, 'All the words are completed and the work is finished;' hence the *Dāsbodh* is not in its original form. Answer: The scholars are agreed that sections of the *Dāsbodh* were written upon different occasions, the first seven chapters having been written as a unit. (11) In verse 3-10-74, the writer calls himself all-knowing, and *Rāmdās* would not have been such a braggart. Answer: The book is in the form of a dialogue between a guru and his disciple, and therefore such an assertion does not seem out of place. (12) In describing the characteristics of a mahant, the *Dāsbodh* sets forth an ideal that cannot be fulfilled and was not realized even by

such a saint as Tukārām. Answer: This is an assertion that must be proven, because unquestionably many mahants did approximate the ideal set forth. (13) Why should the *Dāsbodh* refer to the art of writing? Answer: It covers a wide field of subjects and the art of writing has its place among these topics. (14) Verse 20-10-30 says that the *Dāsbodh* is full of the merciful words of Śrī Rāma, and this must refer to 'the words of the Svāmī's mercy,' meaning that the passage must have been written by some one other than the Svāmī. (The thought here is a little confusing.) Answer: The word Samartha was frequently used in reference to Śrī Rāma as well as to Rāmdās.

This written debate speaks for itself and needs little comment, such a discussion being no new thing in literary criticism. In our opinion, the weakness of the Śāstrī's position is that it rests so much upon the argument from silence, and seems to be rather laboured, as if the writer had determined upon a certain viewpoint, and then sought to marshal as many facts as possible in support of his thesis. Some of his criticism is decidedly forced, and a few of the statements seem to lack adequate foundation. Mr. Āltekār has given an adequate reply to the Śāstrī, who has failed to make his case convincing. The fact that a *Dāsbodh* manuscript has now been found bearing the date of 1684 is an effective answer to point (6) of the above written debate.

CHAPTER IX

THE EARLY MOVEMENT

THE SITUATION WHEN RĀMDĀS DIED

FROM the records available it is not possible to construct a connected and chronological history of the Rāmdāsī sect from the Svāmī's death to the present time. Most of the manuscripts are concerned with the events occurring in particular maṭhs, or with biographical details about the mahants in charge of the maṭhs. As a general rule, each maṭh has a record of the successive mahants who guided its destinies, particularly the larger maṭhs. On the whole, there are few documents which enable us to draw a picture of the entire movement during the past two hundred and fifty years. We know a good deal of certain individuals, such as Kalyāṇ, for example ; but we are only able to draw inferences when it comes to discussing matters of general policy. Mr. Dev suggests that the movement may be divided into three periods : First, the period when Rāmdās was alive, 1648–81 ; second, the period ending with the fall of the Marāṭhā kingdom, 1681–1817 ; third, the period extending to the present time.¹ These periods might also be designated as the period of extensive influence, the period of restricted influence, and the period of little influence. These divisions are more or less arbitrary, and are simply used for convenience, since there are no sharp dividing lines. It is the story of a movement that achieved tremendous prestige under the dominating influence of a great personality ; and then, when he was removed from the scene, of its slow disintegration, until our own day, in which it plays a minor part.

¹ *V.V.*, Vol. II, sec. 64.

Beginning as a *personal* movement, it has remained so to this day, Rāmdās being treated with great veneration during his life and being practically worshipped by many since his death. After his passing, all his personal effects were carefully collected and treasured as priceless relics, the places where he lived becoming shrines. Mr. Rājwāde, in one of his essays, makes a list of fifty-eight places and objects around Chāphal with which Rāmdās was connected at one time or another, and which therefore are treated with additional veneration, this list including trees, stones, idols, fields and shrines.¹

Although we recognize that this movement remained personal in so many ways, yet we must acknowledge that it had become a definite sect many years before the founder died, governed by rules and regulations, and including thousands of loyal disciples. If the Svāmī's death marked the end of the first period, then the beginning of the second period found the sect in the full flush of its youth and power. In a sense it had become a State Religion, in which royalty had a share along with the Brahmans and Marāṭhās, and the decrees of the leader went forth backed by royal prerogatives. We do not know how many maṭhs were established; but it is safe to say that there were several hundred in all, reaching from Benares and other places in the north to Tanjore in the south. Each maṭh became a centre of religious influence in the community, and was presided over by a mahant, the chief disciples presiding over the more important maṭhs. Numerous disciples wandered from one maṭh to another, staying a day or more in each one, giving kīrtans and talking with inquirers. Before the Svāmī died, it was the custom of the mahants to visit him frequently, and he used to examine them, inquiring about their work, and sometimes testing their ability or devotion. Because of his attention to details, the movement had become welded together by common ideals and practices, a common mantra, sect-mark, and system of discipline. Passionately loyal to its founder, and proud of its unique relationship with the Government, if it had had

¹ *V.V.*, Vol. II, sec. 66.

adequate leadership it might have gone on to many years of even greater prestige and influence. But this was not to be.

THE QUESTION OF LEADERSHIP

When Rāmdās died, he was surrounded by a small coterie of disciples, chief among whom were Uddhav and Divākar; and after the last rites were performed a quarrel soon broke out between these two as to which one should direct the policies at Sajjaṅgaḷ. There were other disagreements among some of the disciples, but this particular dispute occupied the centre of the stage, the quarrel becoming so acute that Kalyāṇ tried to arbitrate and conciliate the two.¹ Although he failed in his attempt, his disciples at Ḍomgāon continued their efforts at conciliation after he died. Uddhav maintained that shortly before the end, Rāmdās requested him to take charge of the maṭh. Divākar, on the other hand, had been practically in charge during the last years of the Svāmī's life; and in the opinion of Kalyāṇ, Bhāskar, Viṭhaḷ, Ganeśa and others, he was the proper one to remain in charge.² Mr. Dev thinks that both men were right in their contention. During his lifetime, Rāmdās had told Divākar to manage the affairs of the maṭh, and when he was dying he had expressed the same wish to Uddhav. As a result of this quarrel and of his rejection by the disciples, Uddhav left Sajjaṅgaḷ and in 1685 he retired to Tākerī, where Rāmdās had spent twelve years in study and penance. Here the disappointed disciple practised penance for fourteen years by dieting. Some time after the departure of Uddhav, the disciples became convinced that it was the desire of Rāmdās that Gaṅgādhara Svāmī, the grandson of Śreṣṭh, should be brought from Jāmb to Chāphaḷ and installed therein as the chief mahant. All the mahants agreed to this, and therefore the plan was carried out.

DISCIPLES AND MAṬHS

As has been stated, the history of the early movement is really the story of the various disciples and their maṭhs;

¹ *V.V.*, Vol. II, sec. 93.

² *Patre*, Letters 49-54.

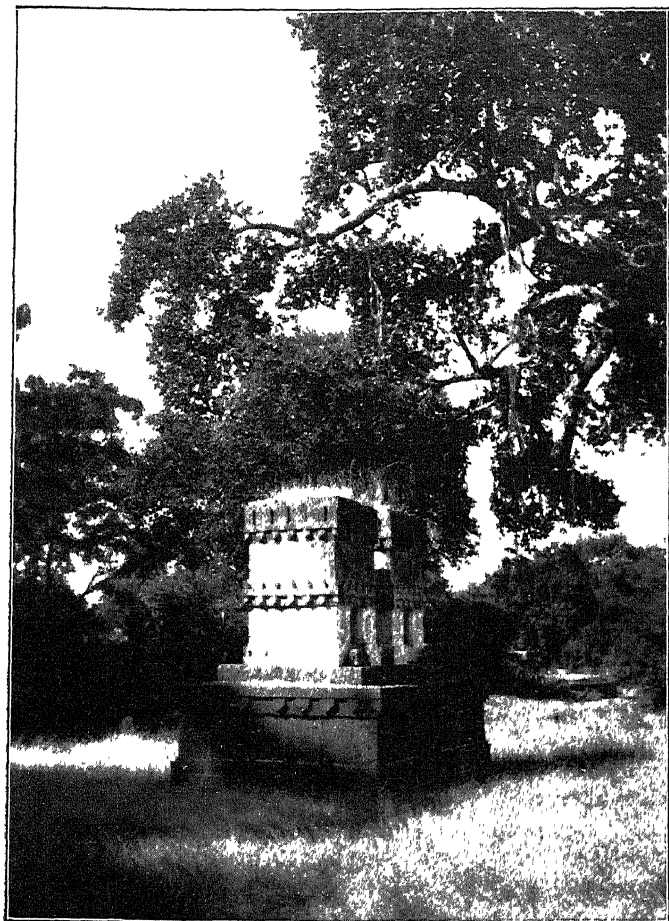
for *they were* the movement. The intimate disciples of the Svāmī, while far below him in general ability, were nevertheless able to carry on the movement with a good deal of momentum, and among this group four were particularly close to him. First should be mentioned his brother, Śreshṭh, who lived at Jāmb and cared for his widowed mother until her death. Apart from his literary activities, we know very little about the elder brother, but there is every indication that he was a loyal son, and a devoted follower of his younger brother. His two sons were Rāmjī and Śyāmjī, whose *samādhīs* can be seen today by the side of the dried-up pool just outside the village of Jāmb.¹ In describing Śreshṭh's death, Hanumant says that he went to the house of one of his disciples for a wedding ceremony.² While returning to Jāmb, he alighted from his conveyance at the village of Dahiphaḷbudruk, and told his son, Rāmjī, that he was about to die.³ He requested them to begin to sing bhajans, and in the midst of the singing, Śreshṭh passed away, at noonday on the fourteenth of the dark half of Phālguna, śaka 1599 (A.D. 1677). After performing the funeral ceremony the son summoned his mother and brother, who immediately came to the village. When the mother arrived, she expressed the wish to die as a *satī*, and did so, uttering the words 'Rām Rām' as she died. Rāmdās, who was at Chāphaḷ, sent for Rāmjī and Śyāmjī, aged sixteen and ten respectively, and they were brought to Chāphaḷ by Uddhav, where they remained for a year, after which they returned to Jāmb.

The outstanding disciple of Rāmdās was Kalyāṇ, the mahant of the Domgāon maṭh, and there are more references to him than to any other disciple. All accounts agree upon his intense devotion to the Svāmī and assert that Rāmdās trusted him as he did no other. His father, Kṛishṇajīpant, was an ascetic at Kolhapur, who married Rakhamabāī, the

¹ *Samādhīs* are tombstones, erected over the burial-places or burning-places of sannyāsīs.

² Hanumant, p. 389.

³ Rāmjī was also called Rāmchandra Buvā.



From a photo by the Author.

THE SAMĀDHĪS OF RĀMJĪ AND SYĀMJĪ AT JĀMB

sister of a subedār¹, and three children were born of this union, two boys and a girl. When the father failed to return from a pilgrimage, the family went to live with a maternal uncle.² Rāmdās met them during one of his visits to Kolhapur, and being impressed by the beautiful handwriting of the boy Āmbājī, he requested that the boy be given to him. Both he and his brother, Dattātraya, went along with the Svāmī, and Āmbā, later known as Kalyāṇ, became a man of large physique, many stories being told of his fearlessness and physical prowess. Although Rāmdās tested him in many difficult situations, he never failed, and was therefore often held up as an example before the others. Kalyāṇ remained with Rāmdās from 1645 until 1678, during which time he copied a great many of the Svāmī's poems, and also aided in the supervision of the other disciples and maṭhs. In 1678 he went to Paranda and established a maṭh at a village called Ḍomgāon, six miles distant. In the year 1714, according to Mr. Dev, the ashes of Rāmdās were dug up and taken to Benares by Keshav Svāmī, who stopped at Ḍomgāon on the way; and since Kalyāṇ had died, the ashes of both men were taken to Benares at the same time. It was singularly fitting that the ashes of the most loyal disciple should have gone with the ashes of his master to their last resting-place.

Kalyāṇ proved his loyalty to the Svāmī not only by acts of self-sacrifice, but also by establishing at Ḍomgāon a maṭh which became a great influence in the movement, and where he surrounded himself by a group of men who were inspired by similar ideals. During his thirty-six years of residence there, disciples came to the maṭh from far and near, seeking his counsel. Kalyāṇ did not compose a great many poems himself, but encouraged his followers to do so, and one disciple named Śāmarāj Kalyāṇ wrote poems in praise of Śrī Rāma and Kalyāṇ.³ Another disciple was Śivrām, of the Āpachanda maṭh near Gulbarga, who is said to have made several copies of the *Dāsboḍh*, one being in

¹ A subedār was a local Government official.

² *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 6. ³ *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 52.

large letters written two years before his death.¹ Although he wrote some poetry of his own, his chief claim to fame is that he was one of the succession to which Ātmarām belonged, who wrote the massive biographical study of Rāmdās called *Dāsa Viśrāmdhāma*, in which there are about 16,000 verses. This succession included Rāmdās, Kalyāṇ, Śiva, Rāmchandra, Ātmarām. Another disciple named Sāma had a literary gift, and four of his poems have been found, two in praise of the sadguru and two in praise of Kalyāṇ.² One of his disciples was Āṇṇāji Bhalkīkar, who was mahant of the Bhātam-bare maṭh, located in Hyderabad State.³ He was unmarried and died of cholera while returning from a pilgrimage to Paṇḍharpūr. Mr. Dev says that possibly Āṇṇāji and Ānand Murti were one and the same. The extent of Kalyāṇ's influence may be gleaned from the fact that forty-three mahants are listed as his followers, trained and initiated by him.⁴ His brother, Dattātraya, whose dates were 1638–1714, is said to have been a sweet singer, and was therefore often given that part of the devotions in which the praises of the gods are sung.⁵ He became the mahant of the maṭh at Śīrgāon near Chāphaḷ, and, unlike his brother, he was married. A copy of the *Dāsboḍh* which he wrote has been found at Gwalior, where his great-great-grandson, Ābā Mahārāj, established a maṭh about 1853, which is still in operation. It is this copy of the *Dāsboḍh* which has been edited and published by Mr. Pāṅgārkar.

The third disciple in this first group was Uddhav Gosāvī. As the story goes, a woman named Annapurnābāi came to Ṭākerlī, where Rāmdās, nineteen years of age, was engaged in devotions, and there bowed before him.⁶ Rāmdās gave her a blessing, saying that she would become the mother of eight sons, one of whom proved to be Uddhav, who became a devoted disciple. He was frequently entrusted with

¹ *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 57.

² *V.V.*, Vol. II, sec. 71.

³ *V.V.*, Vol. II, sec. 61.

⁴ *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 50.

⁵ Preface to the *Dāsboḍh* edited by Mr. Pāṅgārkar.

⁶ *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 38.

important tasks which required tact and diplomacy. Hanumant says that after Rāmdās had established a maṭh at Indore and installed there the images of Mārutī and Śrī Rāma, he placed Uddhav in charge of the maṭh, at the request of the people in the vicinity.¹ Mr. Rājwāde has made a copy of the manuscripts in this maṭh, but none of them are important, one manuscript containing advice to the disciple, probably being written by Uddhav himself. One of the papers describes the looting of Indore by Jānoji Bhosle, May 30, 1762, at which time Govind Buvā was managing the affairs of the maṭh.² Uddhav was present when the Svāmī died, and it was at that time that the Svāmī asked him to manage the affairs at Sajjaṅgaḍ, which later caused the dissension between him and Divākar. The last years of Uddhav were sad, being spent between the Ṭākerlī and Indore maṭhs, part of the time at one and part of the time at the other. From the many manuscripts found in the Ṭākerlī maṭh, it is evident that many of Uddhav's disciples were engaged in literary activities.

The fourth disciple of this first intimate group was Divākar, who seems to have been the business man of the early group. A resident of Mahābḷeśvar, he became a disciple during one of the Svāmī's visits there, and from that time on offered his services to Rāmdās. By his intelligence and loyalty he quickly made a place for himself, and during the later years of Rāmdās' life he managed the business affairs of the Sampradāya, assisted by Bhāñjī Gosāvi and Ākkābāi.³ Rāmdās must have been pleased with his management of things, as he gave him to understand that he would continue in this position permanently. Mr. Dev says that Rāmdās made Divākar's father-in-law, Raghunāthbhaṭ, the family priest; and when the latter retired to Benares, he gave the priestly office with its income to Bhairāvabhaṭ, the son of Divākar. The descendants of the Divākar family are still enjoying this income. Divākar successfully looked after the interests of the Rāmdāsī sect during the reigns of Sambhājī and Rājarām, and

¹ Hanumant, p. 216.

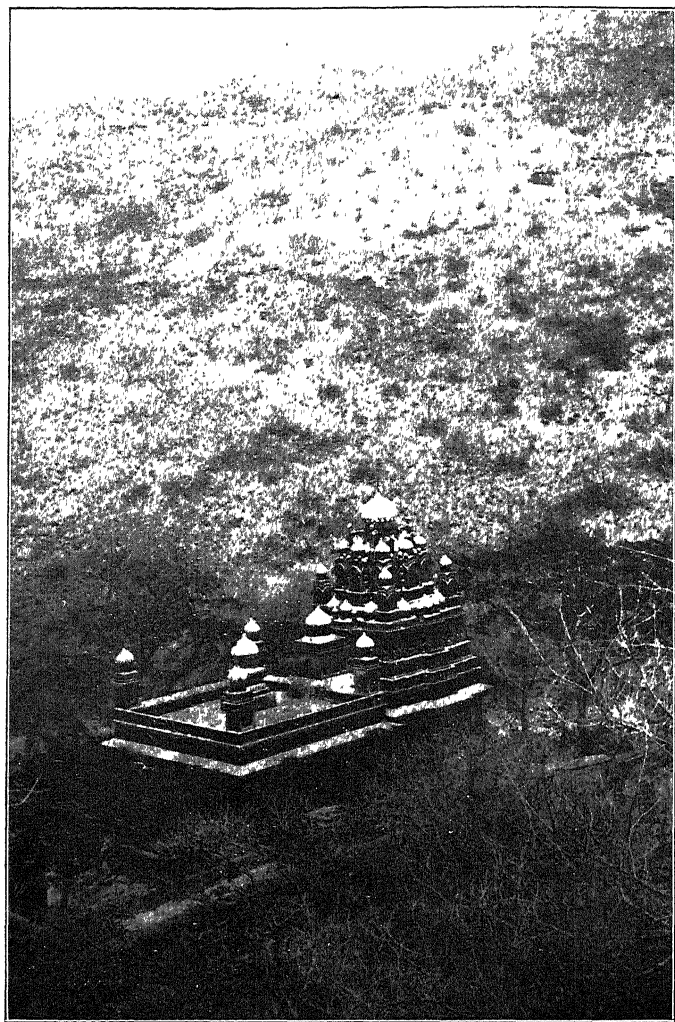
² V.V., Vol. I, sec. 33.

³ The sect was frequently called the *Sampradāya*.

died at a ripe old age. A letter which he wrote to the Rāmdāsī people shews his affectionate regard for them: 'I have grown old and therefore must communicate my thoughts in writing. While engaged in my daily duties I may have spoken harsh words, but if so, it was for the sake of the work. You should not neglect religion.'

There were two female disciples who rank among the leaders because of their devotion and services. Venābāī was a child-widow, the daughter of a certain Deshpānde at Miraj; and meeting Rāmdās during one of his visits, she became his disciple. Many incidents are told of her devotion, one of her chief delights being to prepare his food. Once or twice the finger of suspicion was pointed at her, but her conduct was so exemplary that it disarmed all suspicions. She continued to live at Miraj, but made frequent trips to visit Rāmdās and share in the anniversary ceremonies,¹ she being the only female disciple allowed to perform a kīrtan. She was also a poetess of considerable talent and wrote about 1,500 verses, her best-known work being called *Śītāsvayaṃvar*. One of her chief claims to fame is that Giridhar (born about 1653), author of the *Samarthapratāp*, was a product of her maṭh. He was a disciple of Bahyabāī, who was a disciple of Venābāī. When the latter knew that her end was near, she journeyed to Sajjaṅgaḍ, so that she might spend her last days with her beloved teacher. According to the story by Bhīmasvāmī Śīrgāvkar, Venābāī asked that musical instruments be given to her, after she had been at Sajjaṅgaḍ about fifteen days, and she commenced to sing a bhajan. During the singing she uttered the words 'Rām Rām,' and died, her body being burned with tulsī and sandalwood sticks. Ākkābāī, another child-widow, was the daughter of Rudrājīpant Deshpānde of Chāphaḷ. She became a disciple during the early days and, although not as famous as Venābāī, served her guru faithfully as long as he lived. She was of great assistance in the management of his domestic establishment, and looked after the interests of his immediate disciples, especially in the matter of hospitality. Rāmdās had

¹ On the anniversary of Rāma's birthday.



By the courtesy of Mr. S. S. Dev.

VRUDDHESVAR TEMPLE

Where Dīṅkar practised penance.

implicit faith in her, and one of his last sayings was that she should read the *Dāsboḍh* faithfully. Among all the disciples, she and Uddhav only were present in the room when Rāmdās died.

A third group of disciples were those who were very loyal to the Svāmī, but who were not as intimate with him as those mentioned above. Dīnkar, Jairām and Keshav were a few who might be considered within this group. Dīnkar was probably born about 1628 at Bhiṅgār, near Ahmednagar, and is chiefly known because of his poetic work called *Svānubhava Dīnkar*, which has been published in the Rāmdāsī series at Dhulia.¹ The book deals with a multitude of topics, the chief of which is the worship of the sadguru. He wrote a number of other poems, the manuscripts of which are now with Mr. Dev. As a boy he was fond of reading religious books, until his mind gradually turned toward religious subjects. He had two brothers, named Śyāmrāj and Trimbak, and a sister, named Sāibāī. He had two wives, Soverī and Gaṅgā; a son, Rāmchandra; and a daughter, Dvākā. Like Buddha, his family cares weighed upon him, and when about twenty-five years of age he left his home and withdrew to Vruddheśvar, a mountain temple of Śiva, about thirty miles away. Here, in this beautiful spot, amidst the trees and by the side of a stream, he began to perform penances. After a few months, so the tradition goes, he saw Rāmdās in a vision, and shortly after, the Svāmī himself arrived there, and Dīnkar became his disciple. The Svāmī gave him an image of Śrī Rāma, which Dīnkar later installed in the maṭh which he established at Tīsgāon, a few miles away. From that time on Dīnkar had very little contact with his family, living as an ascetic, and being influenced both by Rāmdās and by Śreshṭh. He had a number of disciples, some of whom were married, and his two brothers were in this latter group. He probably died about 1695.

According to the story by Bhīmasvāmī Śīrgāvkar, Jairām, when a boy of nine, came with his widowed

¹ Preface to *Svānubhava Dīnkar*, p. 3, in the Rāmdāsī Series, published at Dhulia.

mother to Paṇḍharpūr, where he became a devotee of Viṭhobā after her death. Viṭhobā appeared to him in a vision and told him to go to Vaḍgāon, where he would find a guru named Kṛishṇappa. Since his second wife was of low caste, Kṛishṇappa felt himself to be disqualified from being Jairām's guru, but he gave him a mantra, and when he lay dying he sent Jairām to Rāmdās. Since Jairām was unmarried, he was able to accompany Rāmdās on many of his wandering tours, and he finally became the mahant of the Paṇḍharpūr maṭh. Keshav Svāmī was a saintly man who lived at Bhāgānagar, and hearing of Rāmdās expressed the desire to meet him.¹ He sent the Svāmī a letter, and, at his request, Rāmdās came and stayed several days in his home. Later on, Keshav went to Chāphaḷ and remained with Rāmdās for four months. He is chiefly known through his correspondence with Rāmdās, and must have written him frequently. Two of these letters, one written by Keshav and one by Rāmdās, were found in the Ḍomgāon maṭh, and in these letters Keshav referred to Rāmdās as the best of gurus. There was another Keshav, who was the mahant at Kodoli and later at Umbraj, but he does not seem to have had any contact with this disciple, since the Umbraj Keshav was a disciple of Kalyāṇ. According to Bhīmasvāmī Śirgāvkar, Raṅganāth Svāmī was a man of wealth who lived sumptuously, but who became impressed by the miracles of the Svāmī and gave up his bow and arrow in favour of the rosary, later becoming the mahant of the Pālī maṭh. When Sambhājī was captured by the Muhammadans at Saṅgameśvar, Raṅganāth was with him. During the Muhammadan invasion, Raṅganāth, Trimbak, Ākkābāi and Bhāñjī removed the idols from Chāphaḷ to Vagpur, where they were kept until peace was restored. Raṅganāth is said to have died about 1729, leaving two sons and a well-known female disciple named Chimābāi.²

Some of the disciples, as has been stated, were famed for their learning, as, for example, Vāman Paṇḍit, Bhīmasvāmī,

¹ Hanumant, p. 323.

² *Patre*, see Preface, p. 35.

Antāji and Musalrām Gosāvī. Hanumant says that Vāman Paṇḍit was first a disciple of Tukārām, and the latter, who was a Śūdra, suggested that Vāman should go to Rāmdās. The latter told him to perform penances for twelve years and then return, which he did; and after returning, he was given a mantra by the Svāmī. He was chiefly famous as a great Sanskrit scholar. Bhīmasvāmī was a native of Śahāpur and became the mahant of the Tanjore maṭh. Hanumant says that Bhīmasvāmī arrived at Sajjaṅgaḍ for a visit three days after the Svāmī's death; and, overcome by grief, he wrote a biography, the manuscript of which was found in the Chāphal maṭh and which, says Mr. Dev, brings out twenty-five points not emphasized by Hanumant. It is the first biographical account of Rāmdās written by an actual disciple. Antāji wrote some rough notes four days after the Svāmī died, which were copied soon afterwards; but these notes were more fragmentary than the work by Bhīmasvāmī. Apart from this reference to his residence at Sajjaṅgaḍ and his literary effort, we know very little about him. Musalrām was another disciple who wrote poetry, and seven of his abhaṅgs were found in the Ṭākerlī maṭh. Near Āmbaḍ, in Hyderabad State, is the village of Gavarāi where there is a temple of Śrī Rāma, and it is here that he doubtless had his maṭh.¹ Other disciples who settled in the territory that is now Hyderabad State were Trimbak Rāj and Ānnāppā. The maṭh of Trimbak was at Bhālgāon on the bank of the Sukanā river.² Some scholars believe that this Trimbak was the Bholārām mentioned in the biographies, but Mr. Dev doubts this, because both men are referred to in the list of disciples given by Giridhar. Trimbak and his disciples wrote poetry, two of the latter, Harihar and Vithā, writing poems about Trimbak. Ānnāppā's maṭh was at Nīlaṅge, in the province of Bālāghaṭ, among the papers found in his maṭh being a fragment of fourteen verses telling of his life.³ It is said that he became a disciple when eighteen years of age, and lived for a time with Rāmdās, later going

¹ *V.V.*, Vol. II, sec. 69.² *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 15.³ *V.V.*, Vol. II, sec. 76.

off on begging tours of his own. He had a number of disciples, and the poems which have been found show that his handwriting was strikingly similar to that of Kalyāṇ.

Some of the disciples have been referred to in a special capacity. For example, in connection with the Sajjaṅgaḍ establishment, Ānant arranged for the kīrtans, and Kṛishṇa had charge of the lamps. Bhāskar, Bhāñjī and Rāñājī were particularly mentioned in connection with their peace-making activities during the quarrel between Uddhav and Divākar. There were numerous Government officials who became disciples, and it is impossible to estimate the exact number. Some continued in their official duties, while others resigned and gave their whole time to their religious duties. The records seem to show that Śivājī kept a representative at Sajjaṅgaḍ who assisted in the supervision of the buildings, aided in the annual festivals and reported regularly to the king. This arrangement was in force from 1677 until 1710, when Gaṅgādhār was brought from Jāmb.¹ At Śivājī's orders, Dattājī Trimaḷ had fixed the definite amount to be used at the festivals. It is probable that all these officials who were in such close touch with the movement were disciples.

There are a number of references to Vāsudev Paṇḍit, who became the mahant of the Kanheri maṭh.² His original name was Sadāśiv Śāstrī, and he went to Rāmdās in order to defeat him in argument. After his humiliation at the hands of an ignorant woodseller, who answered all his questions, he became a humble follower of the Svāmī. It is said that years later he attempted to change the Rāmdāsī mantra, but was unsuccessful in the effort. At Kārañje there were two Rāmdāsī maṭhs, Bāḷakarām being mahant of one and Pralhād of the other, but very little is known about either man.³ There was a Bāḷakarām, who was mahant of the Nārāyaṅgāon maṭh, who spent thirteen years at Ṭākerlī after his thread ceremony.⁴ The record says that he was a scholarly man, won many disciples and

¹ *Patre*, Letter 13.

² *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 39.

³ *V.V.*, Vol. II, sec. 85 ; *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 14.

⁴ *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 48.

established several other maṭhs which owed allegiance to the Nārāyaṅgāon maṭh. In addition to the Śivram mentioned, there were at least two others. Another very saintly man who became a disciple was Maunī Gosāvī.¹

The maṭh of Devdās was at Dāḍegāon, near Ahmednagar, and although there are many references to his poetry, very few of his poems have been found. Devdās was also called Devrāī, and it is said that he was of assistance in overthrowing the Muhammadan power. Two copies of the *Dāsboḍh* were found in that maṭh, one written in 1777 and the other in 1786. There were at least four other maṭhs which owed allegiance to this maṭh. Devdās died at Benares, whither he had gone with his disciple, Kṛṣṇāji, but his samādhī is at Dāḍegāon. Tinnājipant was the disciple to whom Rāmdās gave five idols and who, when bitten by a serpent, was miraculously saved. At Śirval there were two maṭhs under Nārāyaṇ Buvā and Bāji Gosāvī, the latter being a non-Brahman and possibly a disciple of Vāsudev Gosāvī.² Gopāl Gosāvī is said to have been the mahant at Vaḍgāon, the village made famous by two of the Svāmī's miracles as narrated by Bhīmasvāmī Śirgāvkar. There were twenty or more female disciples, in addition to Venābāī and Ākkābāī, some of the best known being Ambikābāī, Satībāī, Bahinābāī, Nabābāī, Manābāī, Āpābāī, Sakhābāī and Gaṅgābāī.³

ORGANIZATION

The Rāmdāsī movement was not merely a power in Mahārāshṭra; it extended also into North and South India,

¹ *V.V.*, Vol. II, sec. 83.

² *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 5.

³ Lists of disciples may be found in Bhāve, pp. 208, 209; Āltekar (see Appendix); *Pratāp*, section 10. Additional disciples, located in various parts of India, were Mahārudra, Sadāśiv, Hanumān, Dayāl, Vēnīmādhav, Rāmkrishṇa, Harikrishṇa, Viśvambhar, Bhagvant, Brahma-dās, Hari, Rāmchandra, Ānant, Jayakrishṇa, Haridās, Śrī Śāilya-śikhar, Śrī Raṅgapattansāṅkar, Nilopant, Nursopant, Ambarakhāne, Ganeśpant, Nārāyaṇpant, Rāmkrishṇapant, Devagirikar, Bālkrishṇapant, Śahāpurkar, Govind, Sambhu Svāmī, Kodaṇḍarām, Trimbak, Balāl, Ānant Buvā, Chakrapānt, Ganeś, Vīthāl, Narasiṁha, Nirāñjan, Kapil, Jaivant, Rāghav, Mahādev, Kāśirāj, Viśvanāth, Tukobā, Nama-setī, Udās, Jivan, Dāmodar, Ānand, Mārutidās, Balbhīm, Mudgal, and many others.

and the movement was built around the disciple rather than around the maṭh, the chief link in the chain of organization being the mahant. First as a seeker and inquirer, then as an initiated follower, finally as a mahant in his own right and the leader of a group, he was the one responsible for the progress of the cause. Rāmdās had set a high ideal for mahants; and not all the disciples, therefore, possessed the qualities which enabled them to achieve that high position of leadership. The mahant who spent his time at the maṭhs of Chāphaḷ and Sajjaṅgaḍ was looked upon as the spiritual successor of Rāmdās, these two maṭhs and temples being under one management. Very few disciples remained at Sajjaṅgaḍ during the rainy season. Strictly speaking, the movement had a very loose organization. Any disciple could, if he so desired, settle down in a given spot, surround himself with a group of followers and establish a maṭh. Many disciples preferred to live an active wandering life, after the example of Rāmdās himself, and spent their time going from maṭh to maṭh or from shrine to shrine. Whenever possible, they planned to return to Sajjaṅgaḍ for the annual festivals or anniversary ceremonies. Hence there was little difference between mahants and many of the wandering disciples, in so far as spiritual attainments were concerned. Undoubtedly many of these wandering disciples considered themselves to be mahants, and were accompanied upon their wanderings by a group of disciples or followers who frequently were mere boys. All the disciples and mahants looked up to the chief mahant at Sajjaṅgaḍ as their spiritual leader, and if anyone failed to perform his religious duties properly, the chief mahant reproved him, just as Rāmdās had done during his life. After the Svāmī's death, his anniversary ceremony gradually took the place of the Rāmanavamī ceremony as the most important yearly gathering, although the latter continued to be held, and it was during these gatherings that most of the disciples and mahants met each other. Every mahant in Mahārāshṭra was expected to visit Sajjaṅgaḍ at least once in three years, and those outside Mahārāshṭra were expected to go there at least once in every eleven years. Another link was the constant travel-

ling of groups of disciples from one maṭh to another. A third link was their common mantra, sect-marks and ritual.

Each mahant was evidently free to choose his own disciples, and to decide when they were ready for the mantra and vows. Rāmdās had sometimes favoured a person at short notice, but also had kept numerous others waiting a long time. It was the usual practice for the inquirer to come and live with the mahant and remain under his instruction. When he attained sufficient spiritual understanding, he was given the mantra and made a full disciple, a process that often took several years. Married men were made disciples, when they were ready for the step, and occasionally women were enrolled. Although the life of the unmarried disciple (*sannyāsī*) was doubtless thought to be the higher form of discipleship, the married state (*grihastha*) was not frowned upon; and ever since Gaṅgādhara Svāmī, Śreṣṭh's grandson, went to Sajjaṅgaḍ, the chief mahant has been a married man. Naturally the vows of the *sannyāsī* were much more rigorous than those of the *grihastha*, and his daily devotional programme was more intense. Discipleship for such a person was a serious step, because it meant not merely the adoption of the Vedic mantra, caste-mark, dress,¹ long hair, beard and other matters generally connected with the outward appearance; it also meant a severe spiritual discipline, in which the body and mind were brought into subjection by the spirit, and in which the fruits of character became daily more apparent.

The maṭh itself was an interesting phase of the movement. It was not a 'monastery' in the European sense, in which a fixed group lived together on a permanent basis; neither was it an *āśrama* or retreat, where a group of disciples withdrew from the world. Rather was it a centre of influence by means of which the teachings of Rāmdās spread throughout the community. The maṭh was generally a house of some kind, and, as a rule, the idol of Māruti was installed therein, and sometimes that of Śrī

¹ The Rāmdāsī dress was usually a loin cloth with an outer yellow-brown robe or an animal's skin.

Rāma. Some maṭhs were exceedingly simple, consisting of a few rooms only, for entertaining guests. Other maṭhs were elaborate establishments with imposing buildings, servants' quarters, estates for yielding revenue, and much equipment. It was usually the residence for the mahant and for a number of others who lived with him as his own disciples, or for those who visited there for a short time. The family was more or less flexible, the inmates coming and going as they pleased. Unlike the wandering disciples who begged alms for a living, many of the maṭhs were wholly or partially supported by the income from land which had been given by the Government or by wealthy patrons. Although the maṭhs were primarily centres for religious instruction and worship, they wielded an indirect political influence because of their intimate relationship with Government officials.¹ The worship of Śrī Rāma and the Vedānta teachings were the central themes taught in the maṭh, other subjects taught being writing, singing, religious dancing, physical exercises and good conduct. The maṭhs were an element of stability, giving a substance and a duration to the movement which it never could have had if all the disciples had been of the wandering type. Rāmdās evidently recognized this when he first began to teach, and therefore he himself established his first maṭh at Chāphaḷ, where all spiritual seekers found a welcome awaiting them, although discipleship was only given to those who proved their worth. Rāmdās had always been eager to receive intelligent boys into his maṭhs;—a policy which has been true of the sect ever since. Men were rarely made disciples after they had reached an age of twenty-five years, a fact which meant that the future mahants had the finest kind of training through years of discipline and study.

THE RITUAL

During his life Rāmdās used a definite plan of worship, which was taught to the disciples and made a part of the

¹ Bhāve ; see the chapter on Rāmdās, p. 208.

regular discipline. Although the details have varied, these rules have been observed by his followers ever since, and bear certain resemblances to the daily programme of Brahmans in general. In Ātmarām's *Dāsa Viśrāmdhāma* there is a section called 'Rāmdāspanthkramasār,' which gives these details of ritual and daily worship. In this daily ritual, the worship of Śrī Rāma and the study of the *Dāsbodh* were the two chief items of importance; and as a result, the *Dāsbodh* has always been the chief scripture of the Rāmdāsī sect. Numerous disciples may have read the *Adhyātma Rāmāyana* in Sanskrit and other Hindu Śāstras according to their individual tastes, but the poetry of Rāmdās was their chief study, each disciple being expected to read eleven 'Verses to the Mind' and two sections of the *Dāsbodh* every day. Each disciple or prospective disciple was expected to be loyal to his particular teacher, who should be worshipped in four ways. First, he should worship the guru directly, or, if not present in the flesh, he should worship his sandals and samādhī. Second, he should visit the shrines and other places made sacred by his guru. Third, he should worship by meditation, thinking of his guru at all times and recounting his merits. Fourth, he should worship through spiritual adoration, yielding his heart completely and offering his entire self at the guru's feet.

The daily routine was somewhat as follows:

1. A Rāmdāsī should arise about 4 a.m.
2. He should bring into his mind the thought, 'Tat tvam asi' (Thou art that) and meditate upon its meaning.
3. He should remember the mantra by which he hopes to attain salvation.
4. He should call to mind the deity or idol to be worshipped.
5. He should sing auspicious bhajans or hymns.
6. He should think of Śrī Rāma in all his characteristics, including dress and ornaments.
7. He should then worship by waving the sacred lamps.
8. He should bathe and perform the usual devotional exercises.
9. In solitude he should sing the praises of the deity,

performing mental worship and muttering the mantra, after which he should repeat the names of the god, counting the tulsī beads. There should be 108 beads in the necklace, and he should count them at least thirteen times, and, if possible, 130 times.

10. The idol should then be worshipped by certain prescribed rules.

11. The guru should be respectfully greeted.

12. The disciple should bow to the sun.

13. The disciple should repeat certain hymns, and sip holy water, repeating the words 'Tat tvaṁ asi' three times.

14. Then food should be presented to the idol, after which it should be eaten.

15. The disciple should then go about his day's work, keeping Śrī Rāma in mind at all times.

16. In the early evening Mārutī should be worshipped with the use of hymns, *pradakṣiṇās*,¹ salutations and praise, Bhīmarūpī *stotras* being repeated in front of the Mārutī idol.

17. Then food should be eaten.

18. With his mind fixed upon the highest object, the disciple should celebrate the Pañchapadī, which consisted of five things:

(a) He should repeat the formula 'Śrī Rāma Samartha, Jaya Jaya Rāma.'

(b) He should sing a bhajan.

(c) He should meditate upon Śrī Rāma as he sat upon his throne, and should repeat the *Karunashṭake* while so doing.

(d) He should study the poetry of the Rāmdāsī sect.

(e) He should wave the lamps.

19. He should then retire for the night.

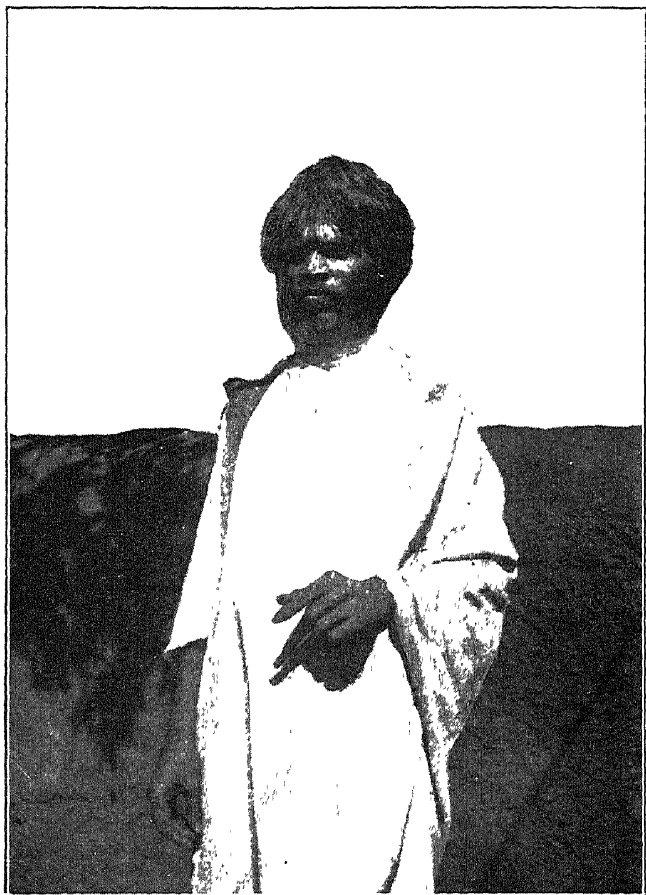
There was a poem found in the Tanjore math, possibly written by Hari Svāmī, which gave a list of twelve Rāmdāsī characteristics:²

1. Celibacy was the average rule, but not invariably.

2. The clothing was of an orange-brown colour.

¹ Going around the idol, keeping the right side towards it.

² *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 10.



From a photo by the Author.

A TYPICAL RĀMDĀSĪ

3. Renunciation and thoughtfulness were essential.
4. The desire for liberating uneducated men was present.
5. Reading the *Dāsboḍh* was most necessary.
6. The disciple meditated upon the distinction between the real and the unreal.
7. There was a daily custom of preaching to devotees, especially by means of the *kīrtan*.
8. Restraint of the senses was necessary.
9. The disciple's mind was at peace.
10. There was regularity in devotional observances.
11. There was love for Śrī Rāma in the disciple's heart.
12. Each disciple was expected to possess a wallet.

Four letters found in the Yekhehāl maṭh also throw light upon this second period of the movement; the first being a letter of instruction, and the last three being personal letters.¹ In the first letter, Ātmarām urges his disciples to worship Śrī Rāma; always to take what was offered by the people and be content; to think good thoughts without feelings of animosity toward anyone, and to rely upon the help of Mārutī. The other letters were concerned with a number of matters, especially emphasizing the importance of faith and industry.

THE CONTACT WITH THE GOVERNMENT

There are a number of reliable evidences to prove that Śivāji was a genuine disciple of the Svāmī. In addition to the letters and the traditional accounts, there is a Portuguese document, written probably before 1750, which tells of Śivāji's mantra.² His father, Śahāji, had evidently taken the title of 'Kshatriya' when in the service of the Emperor of Bījāpur, and according to this account Śivāji received the mantra, 'Śrī Rāma, Jaya Rāma, Jaya Jaya Rāma.' In this same paper five things are mentioned as important for every Rāmdāsī:

1. He should observe the Rāmanavamī every year.
2. He should observe the Dāsanavamī every year.
3. He should observe the guru's anniversary.

¹ *V.V.*, Vol. II, sec. 64.

² *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 34.

4. He should observe the Puruṣcharan.

5. He should not fail to repeat the mantra.

In addition to Śivāji, some of his ministers were disciples, including Pralhād, Rāmchandra, Amātya and others.

Another paper found in the possession of the Mahārāja's family at Satāra tells of the Rāmdāsī devotional programme in the Chhatrāpatī family.¹ There are nineteen items in the list, and they include the muttering of God's name 1,300 times in the morning, worshipping the guru, worshipping Śrī Rāma and Māruti, protecting cows, Brahmans and saintly persons, and establishing Māruti temples in new territory. Letter 19, in the Rāmdāsī series, *Śrīsampradāyācī Kāgadpatre* tells of the Government official who lived at Sajjaṅgaḍ and of his assistance in the management of the affairs there.² There are other letters which show that Sambhājī and Rājārām both continued to take an interest in the affairs of the movement, and to contribute liberally to its support; one letter describing a grant by King Sambhājī to help feed the guests at Sajjaṅgaḍ.³ After the quarrel between Uddhav and Divākar had been settled by the withdrawal of Uddhav, Sambhājī sent instructions to his officials at Sajjaṅgaḍ to carry out the wishes of Divākar.⁴ In a number of letters, King Rājārām gave instructions to various officials to help to maintain the worship in a proper way, to repair the buildings at Sajjaṅgaḍ yearly, to aid in the anniversary ceremonies and to look after the Chāphaḷ maṭh.⁵ His friendliness toward the movement may be noted from the following letter: 'It is hereby noted that the son of Rāmī Rāmdās Gosāvī or the nephew of Rāmdās, known by the name of Gaṅgājī Gosāvī, residing at Jāmb, is a saintly person and devoted to God. He spends all his time in the various ceremonies of divine worship. He has a large family, and his income is inadequate; therefore His Highness the Chhatrāpatī has presented the village of Jāmb to him, to be

¹ *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 29.

³ *Patre*, Letter 34.

² *V.V.*, Vol. II, sec. 84.

⁴ *Patre*, Letters 44-48.

⁵ *Patre*, Letters 69-74.

enjoyed as an hereditary property, and the document thereof has been issued to the chief authority of that district. When the royal army is on tour, strict instructions should be issued that under no considerations should the above-mentioned Gosāvi be caused inconvenience.¹

From the foregoing facts it can readily be seen that the Rāmdāsī movement was singularly favoured by the Marāṭhā Government officials, from the king down, and was practically a 'State Religion' during the reigns of Śivājī, Sambhājī and Rājārām. This close contact probably existed all through the days of the Marāṭhā Confederacy, while the Hindus were in power ; but it gradually grew less as the sect itself declined in influence.

REASONS FOR THE DECLINE

It is strange that this movement, with its hundreds of maṭhs and its thousands of followers, should have declined until it became a mere shell of its former glory. Since the fall of the Marāṭhā kingdom in 1817 it has had very little significance. At the outset everything seemed to be in its favour, since it was aided by a centralized Government and supported by the orthodox religious authorities of the time. Although there was a quarrel about leadership, it was not torn by any other serious factions or dissensions. Nevertheless, it failed to grow after the death of the founder, and soon entered upon a steady decline. Among other causes, there were at least two good reasons for this. First, since the death of Rāmdās, the movement has produced no outstanding leader. Kalyāṇ was easily the greatest leader among the original group of disciples, but even his influence seemed to be limited to his own group of maṭhs. Since the sect began on a personal basis, this lack of adequate leadership was a severe blow. No one of the disciples was able to fill the Svāmī's place, and the Rāmdāsīs as a whole, therefore, gave their devotion to the memory of the dead founder, because there was no living leader capable of holding the whole movement together.

¹ *Patre*, Letter 2.

Secondly, there was nothing in the organization itself which was capable of stemming the process of disintegration. It lacked cohesiveness, and had maintained itself by the sheer power of the Svāmi's personality. Love for him and for his teaching was the motive that dominated the disciples; but when he died, it became a collection of separate maṭhs, and finally the movement fell to pieces of its own weight. As time passed, local traditions grew up in the various maṭhs. The difficulty of travel made it hard for the mahants to see each other, and the spiritual prestige of the chief mahant became correspondingly less. With the devotional discipline upon a voluntary basis, it was a simple matter for maṭhs to lose interest or cease to exist. Political conditions were turbulent, and the depredations of war made the work of the maṭhs difficult. If the movement had had a strong, closely-knit organization, it might have had a different history. If it had had a great moral purpose breathing through it, it might have been a stronger force. But with a devotional programme that tended to be self-centred, an organization that was extremely flexible, and a leadership that was mediocre, it simply could not hold its own. During its third period it became a small sect, of little significance in the religious life of Western India. In spite of this obvious fact, however, the sect has continued to exert, right up to the present, a notable *indirect* influence, through the poetry of Rāmdās, which has always had a strong hold upon the Brahmans and the intelligentsia.

CHAPTER X

THE MOVEMENT TO-DAY

SAJJAṄGAP

THIS hill fortress is to-day the chief centre of the Rāmdāsī movement and is located about eight miles from Satāra, being 3,020 feet above sea-level. The chief approach to the hill is the road leading through the village of Paraḷī, although there is another path that joins this road, part of the way up. As one approaches the top of the hill, he enters an archway that has a Persian inscription, and ascending some stone steps he reaches a second archway, beyond which he finds himself at the top. From this vantage-point there is a wonderful view of the surrounding country. At the left within the fort there is a tomb, and at the right there is a tank with stone steps. The circumference of the fort is about 5,500 feet.¹ Further, at the left, is a temple, and near by is a spot where Rāmdās used to sit, which is pointed out to the visitor. Going further, one finds a group of houses, in the midst of which is a temple of Mārutī, and on the right there is a larger water-tank with stone steps on three sides. Going still further, one enters an open courtyard facing Rāma's temple, in front of which is an idol of Gaṇapati with its back to the temple. Within the temple there is an audience-hall built of wood, with a marble floor, arches around the sides, and a dome crowning the top. The temple is about forty feet by seventy-five feet, and in the audience-hall there are two rows of columns, with seven columns in each row, also circular glass lamps hanging from the roof.

The inner sanctuary contains five idols, namely, Rāma, Sītā, Lakshmaṇ, Mārutī and Rāmdās. At the left of the

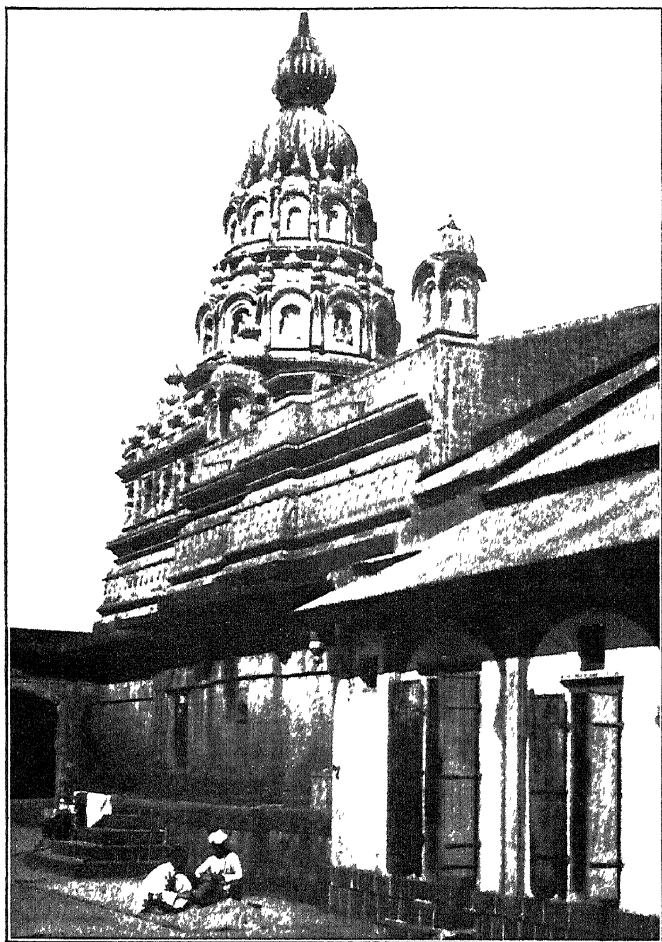
¹ Bhāte, pp. 14-17.

sanctuary there is a dark stairway leading to a room below, which contains the tomb of Rāmdās. This consists of a plain stone which has a crack in the upper middle part, and the legend is that this happened when the Svāmī appeared to Kalyāṇ after his death. Within the room are the idols which were brought to Rāmdās from Tanjore just before he died. In a brass box are the sandals of Rāmdās, which the disciples worship, touching them with their heads; and near by is the Svāmī's begging-stick.

Close by the temple is the math where Rāmdās ended his days, one room containing a brass bed; but according to tradition, the Svāmī slept on a raised platform built of bricks. On the wall of this sleeping-room is a picture of Rāmdās; and according to the story this picture was drawn by a disciple while the Svāmī was living. This room also contains the drinking-goblet and sword-stick belonging to the Svāmī, the length of the latter leading to the conclusion that he was a tall man. In this building are the two large brass water-jars in which Kalyāṇ used to bring the water from the river at the foot of the hill; and if this story is true, as seems likely, he must have been a man of tremendous physique. At the south-east corner, near the rampart, which is still in good repair, there is a small Māruti temple facing toward the rampart; and there is a difficult path down the hill from this side. Facing north from the grave of Rāmdās there is the grave of Venābāī, over which is a bed enclosing the tulsī plant, and further toward the east is the grave of Ākkābāī, which is in a house.

THE ANNIVERSARY OF RĀMDĀS

Every year, from the first of the dark half of Māgh until the ninth, the anniversary of the Svāmī's death is held at Sajjaṅgaḍ. To-day this is the greatest event in the Rāmdāsī year, and at that time five thousand people or more gather together to pay their homage to the great Svāmī, many coming from maths far and near, others from the surrounding villages or towns. Itinerant disciples in planning their travels endeavour to reach Sajjaṅgaḍ at this particular time. Special arrangements are made to care for the large num-



By courtesy of Mr. Marathe

Photographer, Satūra.

THE TEMPLE OF RĀMA AT SAJAṆGAD

ber of guests, the most zealous followers staying through the nine days, others coming for a shorter period, which may be only for a day. The festival increases in importance as the days pass, and reaches its climax upon the ninth day, a kīrtan being given on the tenth day, describing the incarnations. It was the privilege of the writer to visit Sajjaṅgaḍ during two of these festivals and to spend twenty-four hours there during each visit.

The daily programme during the festival resembles that of the unmarried disciples throughout the year, with the addition of a number of special features in connection with the anniversary. About two hours before sunrise the disciples awake and engage in prayer, singing quietly certain devotional hymns (*bhūpālī*). They next worship an idol by waving the lamps around it (*kākaḍāratī*), but in the absence of actual lamps, this worship may be performed mentally; after which they sit quietly in meditation, first worshipping an idol, and later Brahman, the ultimate Reality. For the morning bath (*snāna*) the more zealous go to the river at the foot of the hill, others being content to bathe at the tanks or in their own homes by pouring water upon themselves from a copper vessel. During the morning prayer (*sandhyā*), the worshipper generally faces toward the east, sits upon purified ground and worships God with the use of holy water, ashes, breathings and the repetition of mantras, a description of which is given in detail by Mrs. Sinclair Stevenson.¹ The disciples then go to the temple of Rāma, where they repeat mantras and the names of the god, by the help of the rosary beads, or by counting the knuckles and joints of the fingers, a process called the *jāp*; after which the disciple may read the *Dāsbodh* or listen to a bhajan. During the morning the people form a procession and take the idol of Mārutī around Rāma's temple, then to the Mārutī temple near by, and back again. Following this, many of the disciples worship Śrī Rāma by *pradakṣiṇā* (walking thirteen times around his temple, keeping one's right side next to the building), although this particular devotional exercise

¹ Stevenson, pp. 213-22.

goes on at all hours of the day and night. As a matter of fact, there does not seem to be a hard and fast rule for most of the devotional procedure, and each disciple appears to be free to worship as he thinks best. Generally, during the morning hours one or two of the qualified disciples give a scripture reading, explaining the spiritual meaning of the passages one by one, the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* being occasionally used for this purpose.¹ As he reads, the disciple sits cross-legged before the sacred text, swaying back and forth, first reading a verse in the Sanskrit and then explaining its meaning in Marāṭhī, with the use of appropriate illustrations, so that even the most ignorant listeners will be able to grasp the spiritual truth contained therein. After the noonday sandhyā and the offering of food to the gods (*nivedya*), the disciples sit down to their one big meal of the day.

During the last days of the ceremonies, several thousand disciples and visitors share in this meal, which is served in the open courtyard before Rāma's temple, the Brahmans eating in one group and the other castes eating in their groups. The people sit in rows, the men separate from the women, and the food is placed before them upon leaves fastened together. Several sittings may be necessary before all are fed, and the customary food is rice and curry. After this meal there is a lull in the day's proceedings for about two hours, which is broken later on by the giving of a kīrtan or a scripture reading. In the early evening the devotional programme again occupies the time of all, beginning with the sandhyā and followed by the singing of the *Karuṇāśhītake*, which are sung by the whole group in unison. Then follows the *Savaya*, in which the disciples repeat verses that tell of the greatness of Rāma and of the exploits of Rāmdās. About 7.30 p.m. a procession forms and carries the idol of Mārutī in a palanquin around Rāma's temple, then to the temple of Mārutī near by, and back again. The writer was assured that in this palanquin was a brass idol of Rāmdās, and upon the last day a gold idol of Rāmdās was carried in the palanquin and later placed upon the tomb, where it

¹ *O.R.L.I.*, p. 250.

received the homage of the people as they passed by in a never-ending stream. As this procession to Mārutī's temple moves slowly along, the disciples sing, 'Rāma, O Rāma,' and then shout 'Rāmdās ki jai' (Victory to Rāmdās). In the later evening the main programme is the kīrtan, which takes place in the audience-hall of Rāma's temple, a different disciple taking charge each night. The hall is packed with people, who willingly sit until midnight or later, as they listen to the singing. During one of the writer's visits, the singer was a man overflowing with humour, who very frequently moved the crowd to laughter. The subject of the kīrtan is generally some phase of the worship of Śrī Rāma and Mārutī or the teachings of Rāmdās Svāmī. After the kīrtan is finished the people retire for a few hours' sleep, although all through the night many are stirring and performing various acts of devotion.

According to the testimony of the disciples, every year five palanquins visit this festival, coming from Kanheri, Miraj, Ṭākerlī, Wāi and one other place. They carry either the idol of Mārutī or of Rāmdās, and after meeting at Satāra they journey together to the hill, where they arrive on the seventh day and remain three days. During the festival days the disciples visit the room containing the tomb of Rāmdās, especially the last day, when the wooden sandals are worshipped. Each disciple in turn faces the doorway, bows to the tombstone or the sandals or the Svāmī's idol, as the case may be (*namaskāra*), sips the holy water, and then passes on. Occasionally there are extra ceremonies during these busy days, which have no particular significance but add to the general interest. During one of the writer's visits, two horses and an elephant were brought to the temple courtyard during the early evening. The elephant was anointed upon the forehead with paste, applied by Bāpu Sāheb Mahārāj, the chief mahant and a direct descendant of Śreshṭh. The disciples then came up in turn and touched the foot of Bāpu Sāheb with their foreheads, in order to show their respect.

All through the festival Bāpu Sāheb is the chief personage and receives the homage of the assembled disciples. In

the early evening he personally goes into Rāma's temple in order to light the lamps, which he swings around the idol several times. Following this, the procession forms for the carrying of the Mārutī idol to the temple close by, and in this procession Bāpu Sāheb receives royal honour. He is for many the personification of their revered Svāmī, the teacher and guide of their destinies. During these days upon the hill they hope to receive a spiritual blessing; and, therefore, for the earnest ones among them, these are days of soul-searching and spiritual discipline. But there are doubtless many present who have come because of a casual interest or have been impelled by curiosity, who do not feel particularly sad and enjoy whatever is going on. There are groups of students who have come over from Satāra to spend the day, and a sprinkling of those who have come simply for enjoyment. In the opinion of the writer, the ceremonies as carried on at present do not do justice to the message and spirit of Rāmdās. To the chosen few it may be an uplifting experience; but to a larger number it seems to be either a part of the routine of life, or else an occasion for personal enjoyment, similar to many other religious festivals or fairs held in various parts of India. Although the spiritual quality of the ceremonies is not impressive to-day, during the early days of the movement, when hundreds of maṭhs sent representatives, it must have been an inspiring occasion. In spite of the decrease in its spiritual significance, this yearly gathering still has unique value, because it is the one time when all Rāmdāsīs make an effort to be together; and it is said that even outcastes are allowed upon the hill at this time, but are forbidden to enter the temple or share in the ceremonies.

During the rest of the year Sajjaṅgaḍ is a much smaller colony, and during the rainy season it is practically deserted, since Bāpu Sāheb and his household stay at Chāphaḷ at that time. Nevertheless, there are occasional visitors to Sajjaṅgaḍ throughout the year. Every Thursday about two hundred visit the hill and worship in Rāma's temple, because Thursday is supposed to be the day of the guru, others going up on Saturday, as that is considered to be the birthday of Mārutī. The eleventh day of each fort-

night is the Ekādaśī fast-day, and some visit the fort upon that day, desirous of spending this fast-day upon the spot made sacred by the residence and death of the Svāmī, as well as by the tombs of Venābāi and Ākkābāi.

THE MAṬHS

According to the statements by disciples, there are over forty Rāmdāsī maṭhs in active operation to-day. They are principally located in Mahārāshṭra, where the Svāmī lived and worked, although there are a few in other parts of India.¹ These maṭhs vary greatly in size and influence, some carrying on a definite programme, others simply living in the memory of the past. Each maṭh is a building of one sort or another, and practically all of them are under the management of married mahants, who are supported by a regular income. These maṭhs are used to-day as rest-houses for Rāmdāsīs and other religious men who happen to be passing through and desire to stay for a day or two as guests of the maṭh. If the guest be a well-known disciple, large numbers of people come to interview him while he remains there, either seeking spiritual instruction or desirous of showing him respect. It is the general practice for a yearly festival to be held in each maṭh, to which all the neighbouring people are invited, sometimes as many as three hundred gathering for the ceremonies. For several days there are bhajans and other services in commemoration of Rāmdās, and during the celebration there is a big dinner for all the invited guests. In addition to the higher Hindu castes, Muhammadans occasionally attend the ceremonies; and outcastes also come, but remain outside the temple and eat separately. Those who attend are not necessarily disciples of Rāmdās, but come because they

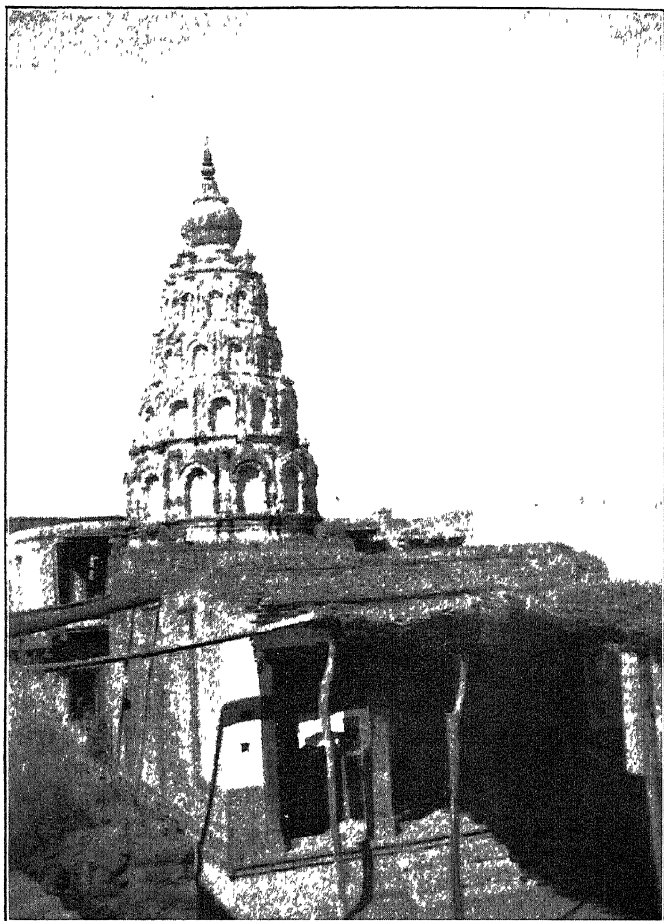
¹ The active maṭhs today include those at Sajjaṅgaḍ, Chāphal, Jāmb, Dōmgāon, Miraj, Tanjore, Kanare, Dādegāon, Tisgāon, Śirval, Tākerlī, Junnār, Nārāyaṅgāon, Kanheri, Indore Bodhan, Beed, Karād, Umbraj, Battisīrāl, Wāi, Pārgāon, Mundpāl, Baroda, Śirgāon, Gwalior, Ayodhyā, Śahāpur, Manpāḍale, Sāsvaḍ, Karañje, Illichpur, Yekhehāl, Āpchand, Manyārguddī, Nīlaṅge, Lātur, Parañī, Bhālgāon, Majalgāon, Waijāpur, Nizamabad, Jukkul, Bhātambare and Nurgāon.

are interested, or else out of curiosity, although many are undoubtedly active disciples.

CHĀPHAL, which was the first maṭh established by Rāmdās, is still in a good state of preservation, standing high up from the river's bank and overlooking the surrounding fields, which stretch away, beyond the village, to the adjacent hills. It is a scene that reminds the Rāmdāsī pilgrim of many historical incidents. It was near here, at Śīnganvādī, that Śivājī received his initiation; and a few miles away is the maṭh at Śahāpur, where Rāmdās spent many hours. In the immediate vicinity is the cave at Rāmghaḷ; also the spring of Kuberḍītīrtha, where Rāmdās is supposed to have brought water to the surface by striking the ground with his stick. When Rāmdās built the Chāphaḷ maṭh, he took two idols from the pool at Aṅgāpur and established the Rāma idol in the temple which was built near the maṭh. In front of this temple there is a Dās Mārutī,¹ and in the rear there is a Bhīm Mārutī. The interior of the audience-hall is finished in heavy woodwork with square pillars on each side, and at the end of the hall there is a raised platform with a door leading into the inner shrine, where the idol is kept. At the left of the temple, as one faces the idol, is a long row of buildings containing the living-quarters of the chief mahant and the members of his establishment. The income of the maṭh seems to be sufficient for its needs, and dates back to Śivājī, who presented the Svāmī with a number of fields in order that the worship there might be maintained.

The maṭh at JĀMB is difficult of approach, being off the beaten track; but is important because it is the Svāmī's birthplace. The writer went by rail to Pātur, beyond Jalna, and from there cycled about fourteen miles over village roads to Jāmb. As one enters the village from the south he passes by a Mārutī temple built of black stone, about twelve feet square, and built upon a raised platform of stone pavement, a three-foot idol of Mārutī being within the temple. According to tradition,

¹ The idol in the servant's attitude, with outstretched hands and palms together.



From a photo by the Author.

THE TEMPLE OF RĀMA AT JĀMB

Where Rāmdās was born.

this idol was there at the time of Rāmdās, and behind it was a *pipal* tree, where Rāmdās slept one night, and where he received a vision of Śrī Rāma. The tree is no longer there. In the centre of the village is the temple of Rāma, with the maṭh at the left, the entrance to the maṭh being at the north-east corner. The temple has rooms and outhouses on both sides, but those on the left side, as one faces the idols, are in a dilapidated condition. In the inner shrine, Rāma is in the middle, Lakshmaṇ on the left, and Sītā on the right ; which is not the usual arrangement, but no one seems to know just why this is so. There is also an image of Dās Mārutī. The above-mentioned idols are from one to two feet high, with clothes and ornaments engraved upon them. The temple is old, having been established before the time of Rāmdās, with a present income of about 5,000 rupees.

The village itself seems to have a devotional atmosphere, especially at the time of the Rāmanavamī celebration, which is the great event of the year.¹ Every day, two sections of the *Dāsboḍh* are read publicly, and drums are beaten for the morning and evening devotions. South of the village square may be seen the foundation of the house in which Rāmdās was born, and a temple is to be built upon this foundation in the near future. A little distance from the village is the sandy bed of the dried-up pool into which Rāmdās jumped when he struck his head ; and nearby are the samādhīs of the two sons of Śreshṭh and the wife of Mahārudra Svāmī ; a Mārutī idol having been set up on each samādhī, in place of the līṅga which is frequently seen upon the samādhīs of Indian holy men.² In the village of Āsaṅgāon, two miles distant, there is no trace of the house where Rāmdās went for the wedding ceremony, the only relic remaining being an earthen pot about eighteen inches wide in the middle. Every year, on the tenth day of Rāmanavamī, ghee is distributed from this pot, which is kept in the maṭh at Jāmb for that purpose.³

¹ *The Hindu Religious Year*, Miss M. M. Underhill, p. 79.

² *The Rāmdāsī Magazine*, No. 86. Article by Mr. D. V. Kāḷe.

³ See Introduction to *Kavita*, p. 16. Ghee is clarified butter.

In Kalyāṇ's ḌOMGĀON maṭh, fourteen miles from Kurduvāḍī, there are a number of interesting relics, which include an original copy of the *Dāsbodh*, written by Kalyāṇ, corrected by Rāmdās, and now published by the Dhulia Sabhā. There is also a copy by Keshav Svāmī, Kalyāṇ's disciple, who became the mahant at Umbrāj; and in this maṭh are the idols of Rāma, Sītā and Mārutī which Rāmdās gave to Kalyāṇ. Among other articles is a piece of the red blanket worn by Kalyāṇ, his worn-out betel-nut wallet, and a pair of sandals that are supposed to have belonged to Rāmdās. Kalyāṇ's tomb was built in 1773, fifty-nine years after he died, and is located in a beautiful spot. Upon the tomb Sanskrit verses have been inscribed and may be translated as follows:¹ 'O Rāmdās, goodness, happiness and joy should be shared by all. Happiness results from the destruction of the enemy and the elimination of distress.' 'The idol of the guru is the giver of meditation; the foot of the guru is the object of worship; the word of the guru is the object of the mantra; the mercy of the guru is the object of absolution.' 'Whatever you eat, sacrifice, give or do; whatever penances you perform, O Arjuna, do it in my name.' 'Wherever Kṛishṇa and Arjuna are, there prosperity and success are sure to be.' 'Residence in Benares, the water of the Ganges, the god Śaṅkara — these all liberate.' The Ḍomgāon maṭh enjoys a good income to-day, and is greatly revered by disciples, there being a number of other tombs here in addition to that of Kalyāṇ.

The ṬĀKERĪ maṭh is in a *historical* spot, because of the years that Rāmdās spent there as a boy and young man. Moreover, it is a *beautiful* spot, the maṭh being located upon a hill near the Nandini river, which joins the Godāvārī, and is only three miles distant from Nāsik. When the present writer went there he found the maṭh to be a substantial two-storey building in a fair state of repair. Under the leadership of Uddhav, this maṭh achieved great influence during the early period, sending out mahants to other maṭhs, some of whom became famous, notably

¹ See Introduction to *Kāvita*, p. 27.

Devdās and Musalrām. In the maṭh are the idols of Rāma, Sītā and Lakshmaṇ, which were placed there by Uddhav Svāmī. The compound is surrounded by a wall, and in an open place at the rear of the maṭh is the spot where Uddhav used to sit and behind which are the small idols of Gaṇapati, Mārutī and the līṅga. The visitor is shown the place on the river bank where Rāmdās used to sit during his hours of meditation, and a little distance from the river, in a small grove upon a hill, is the samādhī of Uddhav.

At NĀSIK is the large temple of Śrī Rāma where Rāmdās frequently went for his devotions while at Ṭākerlī; and although it is not strictly a temple of the Rāmdāsī sect, the Rāmdāsīs go there often, and regard it as a holy place. It is a large courtyard, surrounded on all sides by galleries, with a temple of Mārutī near the entrance and the temple of Rāma in the centre. Within the shrine is the idol of Rāma, with Lakshmaṇ on his right and Sītā on his left. Rāma wears a gold crown, the other crowns being silver, and the idols are dressed in silk garments. In addition to these two temples, there are several smaller shrines, two of Gaṇapati, one of Dattātraya's feet and one containing Mārutī and the līṅga.

ŚIVTHAR.—From Bhor State there is a road which leads down into the Koṅkan, winding through the mountains, and in this mountainous district, about ten miles from Raigaḍ, is the valley of Śivthar. It is most difficult to reach, because of the ascents and descents, and yet it was a spot which Rāmdās loved, and it was in a cave here, located near a waterfall, that he is said to have written the first part of the *Dāśbodh*. This cave is about seventy-five feet broad and a hundred and twenty-five feet long, and tradition says that there were ten or twelve rooms in it when Rāmdās occupied it.¹ The Svāmī's fondness for rugged scenery is evidenced by his reference to this place as his most beautiful maṭh, a bit of heaven brought to earth.² Gīridhar says that Rāmdās established there an image of Gaṇapati which was ten feet high, and frequently arranged festivities for the people thereabouts.

¹ *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 2.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. II, sec. 86.

The TĪSGĀON maṭh, established by Dīnkar about 1653, was undergoing repairs during the writer's visit, and appeared to be a fair-sized building, located in the centre of the town. The old mahant in charge says that he is the seventh in the succession since Dīnkar, and that he has a son who will succeed him after he is gone. Within the shrine are four idols, Rāma, Sītā, Lakshmaṇ and Mārutī, all made of white marble and each a little under two feet high. Rāma stands with a bow in his left hand, a necklace around his neck, a crown upon his head, a silk cloth (*pitāmbar*) over his legs and his right hand extended forward holding a stick. He wears a moustache and has a black vertical line upon his forehead. Close by is a small copper idol, about three inches high, of Rāma and Sītā sitting together, and this was given to Dīnkar by Rāmdās. We perused a few old manuscripts which were kept in the maṭh, but did not appear to be of any particular value. The UMBRAJ maṭh of Keshav Svāmī has three buildings around an open courtyard, with the maṭh in the centre. At one end of the maṭh, in a small enclosed room, is a four-foot image of Mārutī. The maṭh is of mud walls and has a wooden roof, the usual tulsī plant growing near the door, a bell hanging suspended from the ceiling and a few verses written on the walls. The old mahant in charge knows a little Sanskrit and appears to be a very worthy man. During the yearly festival, which is held in April and lasts three days, about a hundred people gather at the maṭh for the various ceremonies. Different castes are allowed to come, including women, but they eat separately. Only the Brahmans are allowed to enter the inner shrine where the idol is kept, and the outcastes are not allowed to enter any part of the temple.

About twelve miles from Kolhapur is the village of MENPADALE, and according to a manuscript found there, Jairām Svāmī was the first mahant of that maṭh, which is still in operation, the name of the present mahant being Rāmbuvā.¹ The PĀRGĀON maṭh is twenty miles from Kolhapur, and tradition says that the Mārutī temple here

¹ *Patre*, Letter 399.

was established by Rāmdās himself, Śaṅkar Gosāvi being the first mahant, and a member of the Marāṭhā caste. This Marāṭhā succession is still in control of the maṭh, and each mahant in turn receives his mantra from the chief mahant at Chāphaḷ. At the present time the maṭh enjoys a considerable income, the name of the mahant being Jagat Jīvan Buvā.

The ŚIRGĀON maṭh near Chāphaḷ is famous because it was the maṭh of Kalyāṇ's brother, Dattātraya, who went to live there with the other members of the family after they had become disciples. Bhīmasvāmī Śirgāvkar, who wrote a biography of the Svāmī in 1797, was a great-grandson of Dattātraya, and other descendants of the latter may be found in Śirgāon to-day. The maṭhs at Gwalior and Baroda were established by disciples of this maṭh. Inside the Śirgāon maṭh is a small image of Mārutī which was placed in Kalyāṇ's home by Rāmdās, and there are also two old pictures of the Svāmī, one large and one small. The samādhī of Dattātraya is near here and the maṭh enjoys a good income, donations coming from various places like Baroda and Kolhapur. The KANHERI maṭh near Wāi was established by Sadāśiv Śāstrī, who became a disciple after his humiliation at the hands of the low-caste woodseller. Here we find the samādhī of Sadāśiv, who later took the name of Vāsudev Paṇḍit, with a number of verses inscribed upon it. The samādhīs of four other well-known disciples are near by, and there is a large Mārutī temple in the vicinity. This maṭh has been influential in the past, having established a number of other maṭhs, but at present it is not in a flourishing condition, because of an inadequate income.

There are two maṭhs at ŚIRVAL, which is a small town on the Poona-Wāi road, one established by Nārāyaṇ Buvā and the other by Bājī Gosāvi. Near the samādhī of Nārāyaṇ there is a temple of Rāma, and when the writer visited this place, the temple and maṭh seemed to be well cared for. Bājī Gosāvi, a disciple of Vāsudev Paṇḍit, was a Marāṭhā by caste, and his descendants still live in Śirval.¹ About fifteen miles from Poona, on the Nāsik road, near the

¹ *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 5.

Śivaneri fort, where Śivājī was born, is the village of NĀRĀYAṆGĀON, where there is a maṭh which was established by Bāḷakarām and which is located on the Mīnā river. It was during his lifetime that Rāma's temple was built, and it is said that his disciples established at least three other maṭhs. He received his mantra from the Ṭākerī mahant, with whom he lived thirteen years, and from that day to this, each new mahant of this maṭh has received his mantra at Ṭākerī, Rāmchandra Buvā being the present mahant. Bāḷakarām is said to have 'taken samādhī,' sitting in quiet contemplation until his spirit left his body.

In Hyderabad State, on the bank of the Sukanā river, is the town of BHĀLGĀON, where there is a maṭh established by Trimbak Rāj, located in an open space and surrounded by high walls. A few poems were found in this maṭh, written by Trimbak and his disciples, and two miles away upon a mountain side is the samādhī of Trimbak with his name inscribed upon it. The maṭh seems to be in a fairly prosperous condition, having an income of 3,000 rupees yearly, obtained from two villages fifteen miles distant.¹ The maṭh at KARANJE, a prosperous town in Berar, was established by a disciple named Bāḷakarām, who was very learned and who roamed about the country, teaching and composing poems, a few of which were found in the maṭh. The INDORE maṭh of Uddhav has a beautiful location, and according to the tradition it was established by Rāmdās at the request of the local Brahmans for whom he had caused the rain to fall at a time of famine. The first maṭh was three miles from Indore, but was moved in 1718 to its present location when a temple was built. A number of manuscripts have been found in this maṭh, including poems by Rāmdās, Uddhav and a number of other disciples.²

THE DISCIPLES

Rāmdāsīs to-day may be roughly divided into several groups, according to the thoroughness with which they

¹ *V.V.*, Vol. I, sec. 15.

² *Ibid.*, Vol. I, sec. 32.

follow the teaching of the Svāmī; and although there are certain elements in common among several of the groups, yet there are also decided differences. The average Rāmdāsī may be distinguished by his clothes, sect marks and mantra; yet even these are not always in evidence. The clothes should be of a red-ochre colour (*bhagvā*), and upon his body should be sandal-paste marks, impressed upon the sides of the face, the arms and the chest, spelling out the mantra. The tradition is that Rāmdās once met the god Dattātraya while wandering in the Himālaya mountains, and he gave Rāmdās garments of the red-ochre colour, a colour that has been distinctive of the sect ever since. The usual marks upon the forehead are three vertical red lines, shaped like the letter 'U,' with white powder sometimes sprinkled upon the line in the middle and upon the cheeks, but these marks are not supposed to have any particular religious significance. The mantra is not secret, having been openly given in the *Dāsboḍh*, but it cannot be efficacious unless one is initiated into the cult by a spiritual guide; and all the four castes are entitled to repeat it, namely, 'Śrī Rāma, Jaya Rāma, Jaya Jaya Rāma,' thus containing thirteen syllables.

The first group of Rāmdāsīs includes about a hundred sannyāsīs, or *viraktas*, who have taken strict vows and who live the same type of life that Rāmdās lived. Those in this group begin their religious life as students or followers of older disciples, wandering about in groups that vary from two or three to a dozen or more, although one not infrequently sees Rāmdāsī pilgrims travelling alone. They have a picturesque appearance, with their flowing robe or animal's skin, their long hair, beard, and small bundle over their shoulder containing their earthly possessions. As they wander from place to place, they follow a flexible itinerary, sometimes making their plans from day to day or occasionally having a set programme for several weeks in advance. Since they are unmarried and without any household responsibilities, they are free to go where they please, and they know no home save that of the Rāmdāsī fellowship. They beg their food as they go, and when railway travel is essential for long trips they find some kind friend to

supply the money. The writer found these men to be of high character and friendly spirit, a credit to their sect and founder. One of the best-known of these disciples is Samarthadās, who travels about with a number of young lads who have been given to him by their parents, and who will eventually take up this life after they have fulfilled all the conditions for full discipleship. Another well-known disciple is Keshav Buvā, who comes originally from Poona, and says that he personally has visited about seventy-five math̥s. Other disciples are Nārāyaṇ Buvā, Trimbak Buvā and Vināyak Buvā. The last-named visited Ahmednagar in February, 1925, with about twenty-five followers, on their way to Sajjaṅgaḍ for the yearly festival commemorating the death of Rāmdās. In the party were a number of boys from eight years up who presented an interesting appearance, garbed in blankets and with unkempt hair, going through their devotional programme in the busy temple of Dattātraya. On another occasion the writer met a Rāmdāsī who was on an extended tour, which included Poona, Thana, Bombay, Baroda, Ajmer, Allahabad and Benares.

A second group is composed of married disciples (grihasthas); most of the mahants belong to this class, which is perhaps a larger group than the first. Naturally their vows are less stringent than those of the other group, owing to the family responsibilities with which they are occupied. Although the ideal of celibacy and poverty is not their chief objective, they are genuine disciples none the less, and they bind themselves loyally to follow Rāmdās and perform their devotional exercises faithfully, in so far as they can. They have the same mantra and caste-marks, but do not always allow their hair and beards to grow long, this being a matter of personal preference. They are expected to observe the three prayer-periods, to worship Rāma, to study the *Dāsboḍh*, and observe the general rules laid down by the Svāmī. Since they are frequently connected with established math̥s, they do not beg their food as the wandering disciples do, but enjoy an assured income, which may come from the rental of lands or from donations received from various sources. Some of these mahants are educated men, who speak English,

and are familiar with the poetry of the movement ; but as a group they are, perhaps, not as well qualified to teach Rāmdāsī doctrines as the first group, who spend all their time in devotion, study and teaching. A few are comparatively uneducated, and are mahants in name only. A mahantship is essentially a life-position, the usual practice being for this position to remain in one family and be passed on from father to son ; although this does not seem to be an invariable rule. When a mahant has no son or is unmarried, he is at liberty to choose a suitable successor and duly initiate him. As with the first group, most of those in this group are Brahmans, although there are a number of Marāṭhās who still preserve the ancient traditions.

There is a third group, which is much smaller, and is *not* strictly a part of the sect, but which is wielding a tremendous influence to-day through their study of Rāmdāsī literature. Within this group there are a dozen or more of learned men and teachers, who are making an intensive study of the Rāmdāsī sect and publishing the results of their research from time to time. A few of them may be liberal Hindus who have ceased to follow the orthodox path of their religion, but who are imbued with the desire to evaluate the significance of the life and teachings of Rāmdās. In this group of scholars are such men as Mr. S. S. Dev of Dhulia, Prof. D. V. Potdār of Poona, the late Mr. V. K. Rājwāde, Prof. G. C. Bhāte, (Principal of Willingdon College), Mr. K. A. Keluskar, Mr. L. R. Pāṅgārkar, Mr. S. K. Āltekār of Karāḍ, and others. These are the men who have made a critical study of the movement and who are qualified to pass judgment upon the vexatious questions arising from this study. They do not all agree as to the exact contribution which the Svāmī has made to Marāṭhī literature and life, but they are on common ground in their appreciation of his poetic genius and saintly character. It is unfortunate that practically all of their work is being published in the Marāṭhī language, so that English readers are unable to follow the results of the research that is going on, particularly at Dhulia and Poona.

There is a fourth group, which is composed of those whom we may call the *nominal followers* of the Svāmī,

who call themselves Rāmdāsīs, but know little of the rigorous requirements necessary for full discipleship. Most of those in this group are descended from former Rāmdāsīs, and now live in the memory of the past, without any vital contact with the movement as it is carried on to-day. No one knows how many are included in this class, but there doubtless are several thousands, a considerable proportion of them being professional beggars, others being ordinary orthodox Hindus, generally Brahmans, who differ in no material way from others of their class. Rāmdāsīs of this type observe the anniversary of Rāmdās, perhaps, and maintain a contact with the movement in a semi-occasional way, but most of the time they are ordinary Hindus as they meet the demands of everyday life. The writer met a man in Ahmednagar who belongs to this group, and who may be considered as typical, named Yeśvant Bāvā. He claims that his grandfather was a Rāmdāsī. Dressed in a *dhotar*, shirt and red coat, he has three vertical lines upon his forehead, two white and one black, and a white spot on each cheek, but he cannot explain why his marks are of that particular kind. He carries a begging-stick, which is a foot and a half long, an inch and a half thick and with a handle of two parrot heads, which he says was made in Ayodhyā. When he rises in the morning, he cleans his teeth, bathes, marks his forehead and prays, worshipping a small brass idol of Rāma, after which he performs certain Vedic rites, presents water to his forefathers and repeats mantras. After reading a section of the *Dāsboḍh* and meditating, he offers his salutation to God and repeats the *jāp*. When his morning devotions have been completed, usually about 8 a.m., he goes out to beg, his special days for begging being Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. It is usually the Brahmans who feed him, and occasionally invite him to share their meal with them. During the afternoon he reads or visits temples, and in the evening he begins his customary prayers, worshipping the idol, repeating verses, reading a section of the *Dāsboḍh*, eating his evening meal and, whenever possible, attending a *kīrtan*. He personally is married, but his uncle, who also calls himself a Rāmdāsī, is

unmarried. He has made one pilgrimage to Ayodhyā, and occasionally goes to Sajjaṅgaḍ for the anniversary ceremonies ; or, if unable to go, he worships the deities at home. He is, therefore, a Rāmdāsī in the sense that he visits Sajjaṅgaḍ, begs for a living in the name of Rāmdās and observes some of the daily ritual. On the other hand, he is ignorant, knows little of the Svāmī or his teachings, goes through his devotional programme as a matter of routine, and although a beggar by profession, he gives nothing in return, such as spiritual teaching or inspiration. He is one of a large group who are nominal followers, observing some of the routine and keeping a slight contact with the Rāmdāsī movement, but who largely miss the real spirit of the original movement.

There is a fifth group, whom we may call 'Casual Rāmdāsīs,' and the writer has met a number of such. They occasionally visit Sajjaṅgaḍ and worship Śrī Rāma in the name of Rāmdās, frequently wearing the dress of Rāmdāsīs, and possibly in possession of a mantra. They also visit Paṇḍharpūr, calling themselves vārkarīs of Viṭhobā ; and journey to Benares, where they worship in the temples. In short, they follow a number of different paths, and try to be loyal to them all, not confining themselves to any particular path or ritual. In seeking to be a little of everything, they frequently end by not being much of anything ; but, begging their way, they go from shrine to shrine or from one festival to another, professing allegiance to each one in turn. While some may be insincere in their free eclecticism, others are undoubtedly earnest seekers after truth, and believe in accepting whatever they believe to be true, no matter where they happen to find it. At the annual gatherings at Sajjaṅgaḍ one may find representatives from all of the above-mentioned groups. The writer met one young man who is a friend of the movement but who cannot be classified because he is not an enrolled disciple. He is a university graduate who has studied in Europe, travelled around the world and has been a student of other religions. Fortunate in the possession of independent means, he is a genuine seeker after truth, and during the past few years he has gone about

with some of the wandering disciples, living their life and faithfully fulfilling the conditions of discipleship. He has not, however, taken the vows or asked for the mantra, because he feels that he is unfitted for such an extreme step, since he is, as yet, unprepared to enter a type of life that makes demands exceeding those of military discipline. If he should enter it, he must do so without any reservations whatsoever. This young man, typical of a small but growing group, is a witness to a recrudescence of interest in the Rāmdāsī movement, due, in large measure, to the present interest in political matters, and to the fact that Rāmdās was unique among the poet-saints because of his interest in practical affairs.

THE DISCIPLINE

There is a book which has been recently published that describes in detail the Rāmdāsī ritual, and therefore serves as a guide for all the members of the sect.¹ It is somewhat more detailed than the section of the *Dāsa-Vīśrāmdhāma*, which describes the Rāmdāsī ceremonies and discusses a number of additional points; but, in the main, the ceremonies as practised to-day are very similar to what they were when Rāmdās died. This book begins by describing the early morning devotions, in which the earth, sun, guru and family deity are all worshipped, after which the devotee looks at a cow. The hands, feet and mouth are washed, after which a bath is taken. Several preparatory rites should be attended to, including the reading of the Svāmī's poetry, the preparing of the lamps for worship, the cleaning of the idol's shrine and the preparation of the incense and eatables to be distributed. While making ready thus, the devotee should continually mutter God's name and repeat ten verses from the *Manāche Śloka*. Then, prostrating his body before the deity, he says, 'Jaya Jaya Raghuvīr Samartha' (Victory to Rāma, the all-powerful one). The worshipper is expected to sing hymns of praise, accompanied, when possible, by a musical

¹ *Rāmdāsī Śāmpradāyik Upāsanā Paddhati*.

instrument; and the book mentions eleven subjects for praise, including Rāma, Mārutī, Rāmdās, Śiva, Kṛishṇa and the cow. The hymn of praise to Rāma may be paraphrased as follows: 'Victory, O thou who art the chief of all the gods, the giver of all happiness, the pervader of all objects both animate and inanimate, victory to thee! Arise, O ocean of mercy, the support of the universe, and remove this darkness from us, that we may see thee. Brahmadev and other gods are waiting at the door; monkeys are clapping their hands with joy, and Mārutī has reverently prostrated himself before thee. Vasishṭha has come; Nārada and Tambu are singing; Pralhād and other devotees of Viṣṇu desire to see thee. Thy mother has come with sugar and cream in her hand; Tulsidās also is present with paste, and Kabīr and Kamāl have brought clothes. Rāmdās and Kalyāṇ are present, and Kṛishṇa has come bringing the holy water of the Ganges; therefore victory to thee!'

The verse of Rāmdās to be recited during the lamp-waving ceremony may be paraphrased as follows: 'Wave the burning wick around Rāmdās, our guru. Victory to thee, O Rāmdās, for whom I have lighted the lamp of my five kinds of breath! To remove darkness, the wicks have been cleaned, and by the light of knowledge, the attainment of the supreme spirit has become possible. Wave the wick, the brightness of which appears so beautiful. O Rāmdās, living at Sajjaṅgaḍ, be victorious! The lamp of my life having been lighted, the sight of thee is auspicious and is the crown of all good; therefore wave the wick.'

Suggestions are to be found in the book for bhajans and also for the hymn to be sung at the time of mouth-washing. After the completion of the bath and sandhyā ceremonies, and after holy water has been presented to the family deity and the souls of the departed ancestors, the devotee should offer a salutation to twelve different idols, making a mark upon his body after each salutation. This worship should be carried out according to the Svāmī's instructions, and the idol should be presented with milk, curds, clarified butter, honey and sugar, rice, fragrant flowers, incense, betel-nut leaves, money, ornaments or clothes; various verses being sung during this worship. After the repeti-

tion of mantras, hymns of praise are offered to Mārutī and Gaṇapati, and then the worshipper walks around the temple. When worshipping at Sajjaṅgaḍ, the devotee is advised to enter the Svāmī's bedroom, where he should sing hymns of praise. Detailed instructions are given for the jāp and for the begging of alms, at which time the disciple should repeat a verse of the *Manāche Śloka* in front of each door and should carry the begging-stick, wallet and clappers. After returning from the begging trip, the wallet should be placed on a wooden stool and the disciple should prostrate himself before the idol, offering food to Śrī Rāma and to Rāmdās. In offering the food, verses should be recited, one of which is as follows: 'O my guru, take food. Śrī Rāma, the protector of the three worlds, having eaten, has asked thee to do likewise. Mārutī and others have eaten and are now bowing before the feet of Śrī Rāma. The body of this, thy distressed disciple, is waving about thee like a lamp.' After giving thanks, the Rāmdāsī should then partake of his own meal; and when this is finished, he is ready for the other duties of the day.

The afternoon should be spent in study, teaching, or in preparation for the evening kīrtan, which is a part of the daily programme. As the sunset hour approaches, the disciple should awaken the idol by the ringing of the bell and offer food to it, after which he should read the *Dāsboḍh* and perform the evening sandhyā. Singing hymns in praise of Mārutī, and walking around his temple, the worshipper should then prostrate himself ten times for the ten incarnations and once for Mārutī. The reciting of the *Karunāśhṭake* is an important part of the evening worship, and these verses are sung in unison by all the disciples who may be in the group; while at the end of the evening kīrtan, a story from the life of Rāmdās is always appropriate.

From the foregoing paragraphs it is clear that while the procedure to-day is substantially the same as it was in the early days of the movement, there has been a development in the intricacy of its detail, which is perfectly natural under the circumstances, many religious movements developing elaborate details of external worship after they have lost

their earlier enthusiasm. It is probable that many of these Rāmdāsī details fail to be carried out daily, owing to unfavourable circumstances; but in so far as they are feasible, they are doubtless faithfully performed. The usual greeting by which one Rāmdāsī greets another is, 'Jaya Jaya Raghuvīr Samartha!' The above description of the ritual shows that this sect has been influenced by other sects and religious beliefs, other idols being frequently seen in or near the Rāmdāsī temples; and it is quite customary for Rāmdāsīs to visit the temples of other gods than Rāma when opportunity offers. The group which visited Ahmednagar stayed at Dattātraya's temple because of its size and convenient location, although there were temples of both Rāma and Mārutī in the vicinity. Just as there is a definite plan of worship and study in the maṭh, so is there a regular programme of study for the boys or younger disciples who travel about in the wandering groups. They study Marāṭhī, Sanskrit, arithmetic, poetry, singing and the regular Rāmdāsī doctrines, being taught by the older disciples during the noon hours while the party is resting. Occasionally boys take up this life who have passed through high school and are familiar with English and other high school subjects. The writer has met a number of such, and was impressed by their general intelligence. The practice of the older disciples is to eat only one meal a day, but the younger members of the order take food two, and sometimes three, times a day, although the food in the morning or night is much lighter than that served at noonday, consisting of fruit, milk, nuts or bread. The noonday meal consists of whatever is given to them by the people in the village or town where they are staying, this generally being curry with bread or rice. The earthly possessions of each disciple are carried in a bundle wrapped up in a cloth, and these may include a copy of the Svāmī's poetry, a brass plate and drinking goblet, a spare garment or two, a blanket or rug, an idol or two (generally Rāma and Mārutī), a begging-stick and wallet. As a rule the older men wear a robe or shawl, but the younger disciples quite frequently wear the customary loin cloth, dhotar, shirt and sandals.

It was the privilege of the writer once to join a group of these disciples, and to journey with them for thirty-six hours, there being three disciples and four students in the group. We left Ahmednagar in the early morning and walked about six miles to a village near the Chānd Bībi Hill, where we spent the noon hours, and continued our journey in the late afternoon for another six or seven miles, until we reached a large village at dusk, where we spent the night. We made ourselves comfortable in the resthouse (dharmaśālā), which was located in the centre of the village, not far from the small stream which furnished the town with water. After the disciples had returned from the river, where they had performed their evening prayers, we spread out our blankets and prepared for the night's rest; the village folk, meanwhile, coming and going and asking questions, much surprised that a 'sāheb' should be a member of the party. Since it was one of the customary fast-days, the only food eaten that evening was a dish of peanuts, which the tired disciples seemed to relish, and following which they sang eight *Karunāśhtakes* with great reverence. About nine o'clock the room became packed with people who had come to hear the bhajan and who crowded into the small space until there was not an extra foot of space to spare. The bhajan was exceedingly well done, so much so, in fact, that in spite of himself the writer was lulled to sleep and only awoke early the next morning, when the disciples were leaving to bathe in the river. After returning from the river they sat in quiet meditation and worshipped the idol of Rāma, sipping the holy water and repeating the mantra.

At sunrise we started out at a brisk walk, because the air was sharp, and conversed as we wound up and down the rugged hills which dominate that section of the Deccan. As we journeyed along we repeated verses of the *Manāche Śloka*, one disciple reading a verse and the other disciples repeating it in unison after him, thus committing the verses to memory. About ten o'clock we reached the large village of Karañje, where we immediately went to the Mārutī temple and made ourselves comfortable for the noon period. Three of the younger men, after praying to

the idol of Mārutī, went out into the town to beg for their noonday meal, going from house to house and being given a little grain at each place. About an hour later they returned, one after another, and offered a prayer to the idol, expressing their gratitude. Whenever the younger men left the group or returned to it, they showed their reverence for the older disciples by prostrating themselves before them. During the two hours which were necessary for the preparation of the meal, the older disciples conversed with a few of the village people concerning spiritual matters. After the food was finally ready and had been offered to Rāma, the disciples all sat down and ate a meal of bread and curry, giving a generous portion to the writer, who sat a little apart from the rest. All through this interesting experience, the writer was deeply touched by the unfailing courtesy and kindness with which he was treated.

THE SITUATION AT PRESENT

In the opinion of most competent observers, the Rāmdāsī sect is to-day only a shadow of its former self, with many of the formalities still practised but the strength of the movement gone. At the height of its influence there must have been several hundred maths, whereas to-day there are less than fifty, and many of these are more or less inactive. From a movement that enrolled thousands of active followers, it has dwindled to a few hundred active disciples, numerous others being disciples in name only. In the early days there were disciples among the Government officials, religious leaders, soldiers, farmers and tradesmen; but to-day very few influential men profess allegiance to the sect. Far different is the situation in the Paṇḍharpūr movement, which Tukārām helped to popularize and which still retains a hold upon the hearts of the people of Mahārāshtra. The power of the Rāmdāsī cult has passed; but it still enjoys a certain amount of economic prosperity, due to the property which is owned by a number of the maths.

Although the organization is only the shell of what it used to be, it would be inaccurate to say that the Svāmī's

personal influence has died out, or that his teachings have been forgotten; and he is particularly revered by the intellectual groups and the Brahmans of Mahārāshṭra, who quote him much as the Deccan villagers quote the abhangs of Tukārām. The *Dāsbodh* has a big sale to-day, and numerous other poems of the Svāmī are read with great delight, especially the devotional poems and the Verses to the Mind.

There is at the present time a small group of men who are trying to revive the Rāmdāsī movement. Urged on by the desire of self-government for India, these men point with pride toward the Svāmī's share in the reconstruction of Mahārāshṭra under Śivājī, and evidently believe that a reawakening of interest in Rāmdās will have beneficial effects in the present social and political evolution of India. Unfortunately, the present agitation has taken on a factional spirit, causing the Brahmans to magnify Rāmdās, and the non-Brahmans to urge the claims of Śivājī, a discussion that can bear little fruit and is capable of doing a great deal of harm. Whether the attempt to revive the Rāmdāsī cult will succeed is an open conjecture, but, in the writer's judgment, the obstacles against it are too great to be overcome. It has reached a stage where revival is well-nigh impossible, and it lacks an aggressive programme, so that it is not likely to catch the imagination of modern India, in which far-reaching social and political changes are taking place. As a practical and spiritual teacher, however, the Svāmī's claim to fame is secure; and even though the movement, as such, dies out entirely, his poetry will continue to be read by the people of Mahārāshṭra. With Dnyāneśvar, Eknāth, Nāmdev and Tukārām, Rāmdās stands as one of the great religious teachers of Western India, with a widespread influence and a loyal following.

CHAPTER XI

RĀMDĀS AND JESUS

INTRODUCTION

IN the last chapter it was stated that at the present time there is a definite effort to revive the Rāmdāsī movement. The question is very opportune, therefore, as to just what the message of Rāmdās for modern India is; inasmuch as all students of Rāmdās must recognize that the India of to-day is decidedly different from the India of Rāmdās. In the first place, cultural India has felt the impact of other religious systems and philosophies, and comparative religion has become a world-wide study. Students in Indian universities have been gaining a first-hand knowledge of modern science, in all its varied ramifications; with the result that they have necessarily had to readjust their outlook in religious matters. Whether it be for better or for worse, India has felt the influence of Western thought and life, and thousands of her sons and daughters are imbibing the spirit of the West by residence abroad. In numerous ways, therefore, these outside influences are shaping the present and future development of India, a fact which must be taken into account by those who seek to discover the message of the outside world for India and that of India for the outside world.

Again, it is clear to most observers that Indian religious thinkers are taking an increased interest in the personality of Jesus; and hence the question of the place of Rāmdās in modern India must be answered after due allowances have been made for this new development. Mahātmā Gāndhī, by his life and his writings, has centred the thought of India upon Jesus. He has made no secret of his reverence for Hīm, and has even been willing to make

suggestions as to how the Christian missionaries may more effectively carry on their work. When criticized by some Hindus for teaching the New Testament in the Gujarat National College, he replied, 'The charge of being a Christian in secret is not new. It is both a libel and a compliment; a libel because there are men who can believe me to be capable of being secretly anything, that is, for fear of being that openly. There is nothing in the world that would keep me from professing Christianity, or any other faith, the moment I felt the truth of and the need for it. Where there is fear there is no religion. The charge is a compliment in that it is a reluctant acknowledgement of my capacity for appreciating the beauties of Christianity. Let me own this. If I could call myself, say, a Christian, or a Mussulman, with my own interpretation of the Bible, or of the Koran, I should not hesitate to call myself either. For then Hindu, Christian and Mussulman would be synonymous terms. I do believe that in the other world there are neither Hindus, nor Christians, nor Mussulmans. There, all are judged not according to their labels or professions, but according to their actions, irrespective of their professions. During our earthly existence, there will always be labels. I, therefore, prefer the label of my forefathers, so long as it does not cramp my growth and does not debar me from assimilating all that is good everywhere else.'¹

It is neither feasible nor desirable in this chapter to compare Hinduism and Christianity as distinct religious systems, in view of their vastness and complexity. The difficulty lies not merely in the fact that Christianity is sometimes identified with Western civilization, but also that there are sharp distinctions between branches of the Christian Church, both in doctrine and polity. Similarly, Hinduism is a *group* of religious systems, rather than any one system, and it would be difficult indeed to present the various Hindu sects and philosophies as a harmonious whole. Nevertheless, there are a number of scholars to-day who are willing to attempt general comparisons

¹ *The Missionary Herald*, Jan., 1927.

and to draw certain conclusions from them. There is, for example, a renewed emphasis upon the importance and value of Sanskrit culture as opposed to other culture. At the fiftieth anniversary of the Sanskrit College in Mysore, the Mahārāja, referring to the Hindu renaissance, and the unique contribution of Hindu thought for mankind, said, 'It is not from the standpoint of objective knowledge that we should adjudge the value of Sanskrit learning. For the Knower that stands behind the Knowledge has also to be known and it is this *Ātma-Vidyā*, the knowledge of the Self, to which the study of Sanskrit opens the way in a sense which is true of no other literature to the same degree.'¹ Some Hindu apologists are not so optimistic, and feel that the Hindu renaissance is not progressing satisfactorily. Even so notable a scholar as Prof. Radhakrishnan asserts that modern Hindus are very unworthy descendants of the great *rishis* who gave the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads* to the world.² An extreme view of the matter has been taken by a number of orthodox Hindus, who openly attack Mr. Gāndhi for his so-called aspersions upon the caste system, and assert that the Hindu religion must be saved, meaning, of course, orthodox Hindu practices and beliefs. Shortly after the Belgaum Congress, there was a public meeting in Bombay to protest against Mr. Gāndhi's heresies, such as the removal of untouchability; and at that meeting various steps were discussed which might help to check the influence of Mr. Gāndhi's programme. It is clear that the modern emphasis on the importance and value of Hindu culture sometimes carries with it a defence of the established order, and a deep-rooted opposition to religious and social change.

But while a comparison between Hinduism and Christianity is apt to lead one into lengthy discussion, it is entirely feasible to consider the teaching of Rāmdās and of Jesus, and to discover wherein they agree or disagree. This is in line with the announced purpose of the 'Religious Life of India Series,' with which this volume is connected. It is

¹ *The Indian Social Reformer*, Oct. 30, 1926, p. 131.

² *Ibid.*, Nov. 20, 1926, p. 182.

also a question that has genuine interest for all Indian students of religion. Hindus as well as Christians recognize to-day the distinction between Jesus Himself and Christianity as an applied system of thought and life under varying conditions. In an article in *The Indian Social Reformer*, Mr. S. S. Singha speaks of the disillusionment which comes to many Hindu students who travel in Christian lands, and see for themselves the forms and features of applied Christianity—or, shall we say, the *lack* of applied Christianity?—for Western nations have certain policies and social practices which are out of harmony with the teaching of Jesus.¹ Besides acknowledging this distinction, Hindus to-day are also coming to recognize their kinship with their Indian Christian brethren, on the ground that they use the same mother-tongue, belong to the same country, and seek to develop the same Indian culture. Such an attitude is found even in that most Nationalist and most Hindu of Marāṭhī weeklies, the *Kesari* of Poona.² If, then, the teaching of Jesus is to be distinguished from numerous instances of applied Christianity, and if a Hindu can be a follower of Jesus without being denationalized, then assuredly the question of Christ's message for India to-day is a pertinent one, and any effort to resuscitate the Rāmdāsī cult must take this new development into account. Indeed, for some years past, Hindu thinkers *have* been facing the problem of the place of Jesus in the religious life of India. In 1903 Dr. P. R. Bhandārkar wrote an English essay, entitled *Two Masters : Jesus and Tukārām*, in which he mentioned many coincidences of teaching, and he closed with these words, 'If this essay of mine leads one Hindu to read the Gospels with reverence, and one Christian to read Tukārām with the same reverence, I shall consider myself to be amply compensated.'³ Similarly, the late Sir Nārāyaṇ Chandāvarkar stated in *The Times of India* that the best minds of India were trying to diffuse among the masses the best that is in the Indian religions, and to

¹ *The Indian Social Reformer*, Jan. 30, 1926, p. 331.

² *Dnyanodaya*, Dec. 16, 1926, p. 479. ³ Edwards, pp. 240-41.

show that the best is not different from, but is the same as, Christ's teaching.¹ Dr. Stanley Jones, in his book, *The Christ of the Indian Road*, gives ample testimony to this growing appreciation of Jesus among thinking Indians of all groups, particularly in student centres; some even going beyond Mr. Gāndhi in the wholeheartedness of their tribute to the Christian cause. When the latter, about two years ago, criticized Christian missions and missionaries for certain failings, he was answered by a Brahma Samajist, Prof. U. N. Ball, in *The Indian Messenger* of Calcutta. Among other things, Prof. Ball said, 'India owes a great deal to Christianity for her present position, and so far as we can judge, she can ill afford to dispense with the Christian service. . . . With only Jesus as their guide, they have gone into the remote interior, spread education among the illiterate, served the poor and the lowly, picked up the helpless and stood valiantly by those who were altogether neglected by their own people. This is no mean service to India . . . and our countrymen will do well to imitate them. Jesus was a humble servant of humanity and His followers have formed themselves into a grand organization for social service.'² The desire to relate Jesus to Hinduism seems to have reached its culmination in the startling attempt of Mr. M. S. Rāmasvāmī Aiyer to prove that Christ was a Tamil Hindu; a conclusion which, while certain to be speedily refuted by qualified historical students, nevertheless furnishes an interesting index to a great deal of the modern Hindu thinking about Jesus.³

This chapter, therefore, will be a brief attempt to evaluate the message of Rāmdās for modern India, with the teaching of Jesus as a background. Can Rāmdās catch the imagination of India to-day, and will his message answer the deepest needs of Hindu hearts? Will those who are searching for truth be able to rally round the Svāmī's personality and find in his teachings those eternal principles which lead mankind to a new and better day? Or has

¹ Edwards, p. 239.

² *Dnyanodaya*, Jan. 14, 1926, p. 12.

³ *The Indian Social Reformer*, Dec. 25, 1926.

Jesus something to offer which Rāmdās knew not of, and which is vitally needed in our day of disillusionment and perplexity? For this purpose it will be necessary to recapitulate some of the statements found in Chapters V and VI.

(A) THEOLOGICAL

1. *God*

As we peruse the pages of the *Dāsboḍh* to discover the teachings of Rāmdās about God, we are impressed first of all by the portrait he draws of the impersonal spirit, who can only be described by such words as Being, Intelligence and Bliss, and even these are inadequate; a 'Being' who, while immanent, is also transcendent; a Being who is nameless, invisible and beyond imagination. He is Brahman, the one and ultimate reality, the form of whom cannot be known or described, and who is without a witness. On the other hand, he has different manifestations, fourteen of which have been mentioned by the Svāmī in one section of the *Dāsboḍh*. This testimony is substantially the same as given by Śaṅkara many centuries earlier, and is the famous doctrine which is the basis of the Vedānta philosophy.

Secondly, between these allusions to Brahman, Rāmdās frequently alludes to Śrī Rāma, his hero-god, whom he worships with all the ardour of his nature. He describes Rāma as loving, kind, generous, powerful and merciful; attributes to him all power in his dealings with mortal beings, and looks to him for daily guidance. Rāma is personal and knowable; one who helps in time of distress and who is ever eager to minister to the needs of his devotees; and while he recognizes that there are other gods, Rāmdās asserts that Rāma is the one true God, who alone should be worshipped. Thirdly, Rāmdās, both in his teaching and his practice, was a worshipper of idols, as the following quotation demonstrates: 'The one who neglects to worship the idol, because he considers himself well-versed in the knowledge of Brahman, will eventually be deprived of both.'¹ It may be argued that the Svāmī looked upon

¹ *Dāsboḍh*, ch. x, sec. 7.

idols purely as symbols, and it is indeed difficult to know just what was in his mind when he bowed in devotion before an idol; but when he stated that there were four classes of deities, the first class being idols, it seems clear that at times the Svāmī regarded the image itself as sacred, and not merely as an aid toward mental concentration.¹

Jesus begins His teaching concerning God by appealing to the Old Testament, which He had studied carefully in His youth and which was the basis of His own teaching. Here we find the teaching that God is Spirit, the supreme personality, both immanent and transcendent, the Creator of the universe, omniscient and omnipotent, morally perfect and the author of the moral law, yet having intimate relationships with every human being, revealing Himself to men, answering prayer, comforting the poor and the oppressed, and asking for the love and worship of all human beings.² Jesus does not stop, however, with Old Testament teaching, but carries His revelation of God to an even higher place, teaching that God is the loving Father of each human child and interested in the most minute details of daily life. 'If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?'³ Jesus portrays the Father whose tender love is limitless, who is ever ready to take upon Himself all our sorrows and trials, who reveals Himself through the beauty of nature as well as through the noble aspects of individual and social life. Jesus lived in a universe in which persons were living, and which was the revelation of a personal God, the loving Father of all creation.

As we study the verses of Rāmdās which reveal his love for Śrī Rāma, we note certain similarities between his teaching and that of Jesus. Both worshipped a personal, spiritual God and looked to Him daily for guidance. Both believed that this personal God desires to be worshipped

¹ *Dāsbodh*, ch. xi, sec. 2.

² *The Crown of Hinduism*, J. N. Farquhar, pp. 408-18.

³ Matthew vii : 11.

through loving devotion rather than through external ceremonies and sacrifices. Both were confident that this personal God cares for and protects His worshippers, helping them in time of need, in order that they may overcome the temptations of daily life. Just as Jesus was conscious of God's presence, so did Rāmdās pray for this mystical experience. It is thus as a bhakta that Rāmdās comes closest to Jesus in his thought about God. Unfortunately, he did not confine himself to this bhakti teaching, but also taught the doctrine that God is impersonal. There are learned apologists who assert that a religious teacher can believe in both a personal and in an impersonal God without inconsistency, on the ground that one is concerned with religious faith and the other with philosophy. The writer is unable to accept this conclusion, and believes that the doctrine of a personal God contradicts that of an impersonal God. The whole problem of personality is involved here; and while it is a subject which is being actively investigated in psychological circles, the fact remains that personality, as we know it, has definite characteristics, and to say that God can be both personal and impersonal at the same time leads to grave confusion of thought.

The mental confusion which is produced by the inconsistency of the Svāmī's teaching about God is deepened by his acceptance and use of idols. He established both Māruti and Rāma idols in a number of shrines, gave small idols to various disciples, and worshipped them in his devotions, defending such action in a number of poetic references. Even though idols may have been of lesser importance in his own mind, his use of them means that he was an upholder of idolatry, a system more and more discountenanced by Hindu religious reformers, such as the members of the Prārthanā Samāj; though generally defended by Hindus, on the ground that it is a help toward mental concentration, the idols, according to that view, being simply *symbols* of the Divine Spirit. In other words, Hindu reform movements have advanced far beyond the teaching of Rāmdās concerning idols, and they can no more accept such teaching than they can approve of the

Svāmī's inconsistency. As contrasted with the teaching of Jesus about God, we cannot but regard that of Rāmdās as blurred, and it is indeed difficult to know just what thoughts on this subject were dominant in his mind.

Furthermore, in addition to the problem of inconsistency, there is a distinction in the *content* of the two respective teachings. The spiritual experience of Rāmdās, as reflected in his verses about Śrī Rāma, lacks the depth and richness of that of Jesus in His sureness of God. No doubt, the Svāmī was handicapped by the fact that he worshipped a god whose origin was obscured by mythology, and who, in the view of many, was originally a man and later deified; whereas Jesus told mankind of the one true God who had revealed Himself to Hebrew seers and of whom He (Jesus) could speak out of His own profound spiritual experience. The *ethical* character of God as taught by Jesus was different from the teaching of Rāmdās in several important particulars; and this will be discussed in detail later. It almost seems as though there was an element of lightness or of chance in the Svāmī's thought of Rāma, which, while not nearly so pronounced as in the thought of Chaitanya concerning Kṛishṇa,¹ is nevertheless decidedly different from the teaching of Jesus about God. Jesus thought of God as loving mankind to such an extent that He was willing to make any sacrifice, no matter how great, in order that men might know of this love. Jesus indeed thought of God as having an intimate fatherly relationship with each of His human children, a relationship so tender that anyone, no matter how humble, could respond to it and dwell within it. And it may well be asked whether, having come to know God as taught by Jesus, the all-knowing Father, Creator and Redeemer, Hindus can rest content with the teaching of the Svāmī, who tells us of Śrī Rāma, the impersonal Brahman and the idol within the shrine.

2. *Redemption*

Just as in his teaching about God, so also concerning salvation, Rāmdās taught a number of distinct doctrines.

¹ *The Chaitanya Movement*, M. T. Kennedy, p. 226.

The most prominent method of salvation, perhaps, according to the Svāmī, was that of knowledge ; this method being especially emphasized by the Vedānta school. It accepted *transmigration* and *karma*, holding the view that the world was something to escape from, an intolerable succession of births and deaths that held one in its grip, each existence atoning for the mistakes of former existences, the process continuing indefinitely until release could be effected and salvation achieved. When the seeker after salvation realizes that the world is illusion, and that he himself is Brahman—‘Tat tvam asi’ (Thou art that)—then the chain of rebirths is broken, and his identity becomes merged with Brahman. As brought out in Chapter V, Rāmdās discussed various steps in connection with this search for the ultimate reality. Secondly, he also taught salvation by works, not according to the extreme ascetic practices of the yoga school, which he did not hesitate to frown upon, but according to the teachings of the *Gītā*; such as unselfish acts, the repetition of the mantra, and other ceremonies which he regarded as important. Thirdly, he taught that salvation could be achieved by devotion to Rāma, a doctrine of the bhakti school of Vaishṇavism, and in this connection he stressed the nine kinds of devotion which would help to draw the soul nearer to God. The worship of the idol was a prominent part of this bhakti doctrine, as also reverence for the guru. There was a distinction, however, between the salvation which was won by devotion to Rāma and that achieved by knowledge; for the latter meant absorption into Brahman as a drop of water becomes merged with the ocean, while the former was a communion between the human soul and God, which eventuated in a spiritual fellowship in heaven, the soul dwelling with God in a state of bliss forever. The scattered references in the Svāmī’s poetry to the *Purāṇas* are so incidental that we have no reason to believe they bulked largely in his thought.

For Jesus, salvation consisted in the reconciliation between God, the loving Father, and His human children. Christ stated that He came to tell men of God’s love and of God’s supreme desire that all men should abide in that

love. By His own wondrous deeds, Jesus made God real to His disciples and taught them to love the Father and to realize that God watches over everyone with a Father's care. In the words of Dr. Cave, 'Fatherhood, as Christ conceived it, is a moral relationship, and God's gratuitous and forgiving love requires as its complement our childlike trust and receptivity.'¹ By leaving off evil desires and learning to love God, men become His sons and begin to reflect His character. All cherished sins must be ruthlessly abandoned in order to win the pearl which is above every price. This gift is not earned by men, but is the free gift of His grace, those who accept it rejoicing in His forgiveness and finding themselves redeemed, not alone from sin, but also from the strain and stress of the world. All who seek this fellowship with the Father are naturally deeply repentant for every unworthy act of the past, and are desirous of growing in beauty of character. It is therefore a spiritual relationship, which begins here and now, the future becoming present and the present being projected into the future. Jesus definitely taught that all who love God while living in this world would belong to Him in the next, heaven being the sphere of the eternal where all who love God abide with Him forever. Hence Jesus could tell the Pharisees that the Kingdom of God was already in their midst. His teaching emphasized the sanctity of the individual personality and its eternal qualities. He thought of the world as a sphere of service and opportunity, not as something inherently evil, from which one should seek to escape. It is true that Jesus sometimes spoke of the world as evil, in contrast with God's kingdom, but in using these words He was referring to the *sins* of the world rather than to physical life as such. To sum up, Jesus taught that salvation by God's grace is a spiritual process by which the human soul comes into living and loving fellowship with God, growing daily by His help into beauty of character, a relationship that endures forever, a salvation from sin and for service.

It is the Svāmī's doctrine of salvation by devotion which

¹ *Redemption : Hindu and Christian*, Sydney Cave, p. 146.

furnishes the closest parallel to the teaching of Jesus and we find certain points of similarity. If Rāmdās had confined his message concerning redemption to this one method, the application of his message to modern conditions would have been less difficult; although even here, his teachings stress certain external observances in a way that cannot find acceptance with Hindu reform leaders to-day. It is not quite clear how prominent in the Svāmī's mind was the element of redemption in the character of Śrī Rāma; and although he may not have agreed with Tulsī Dās, who stated that Śrī Rāma himself had redeemed only one woman, it is evident that Rāmdās did not *stress* redemption as Jesus did.¹

In his other doctrines concerning salvation, Rāmdās shows many divergencies from the teaching of Jesus. His attitude toward life itself tended to be pessimistic, so that his thought about salvation was negative rather than positive, emphasizing the idea of escape *from* the world rather than salvation *for* a fuller and richer life. Even if some of the intelligentsia do hold the Vedānta doctrine only as an academic belief, and expect to be with God after death, it is assuredly true that large numbers of people still accept the Vedānta system literally. The belief in *karma* and *transmigration* was an iron chain that prevented Rāmdās from rising to a lofty conception of salvation in which the positive thought prevailed and spiritual processes were predominant. Just as the basis of his doctrines was pessimistic and negative, so also many of the steps in these systems were chiefly mechanical.² The mere repetition of a mantra is without any special spiritual significance and entirely incapable of uniting a human soul with God.

While it may be conceded that the teachings of Rāmdās about redemption are still acceptable to large numbers of Hindus who follow the orthodox path, it is none the less true that many Hindus have progressed far beyond the Svāmī's teaching. They demand a union with God which

¹ *The Crown of Hinduism*, J. N. Farquhar, p. 442.

² *Redemption: Hindu and Christian*, Sydney Cave, p. 225. *Indian Theism*, N. Macnicol, p. 223.

stresses duty and service. 'Who is there,' says Rabindranath Tagore, 'that thinks the union between God and man is to be found in some secluded enjoyment of his own imaginings away from the sky-towering temple of the greatness of humanity, which the whole of mankind in sunshine and in storm is toiling to erect through the ages? . . . He who thinks to reach God by running away from the world, when and where does he expect to meet Him? . . . We must be brave enough to be able to say that we are reaching Him here in this very spot, now at this very moment.' Not only do progressive Hindu leaders to-day demand a positive attitude toward life in general, they also require consistency in the doctrine of redemption; and here again Rāmdās surely fails to meet their advanced requirements. The increasing interest in the personality of Jesus on the part of these Hindu religious thinkers is weighty evidence that more and more His message of God's redeeming love is gripping the hearts of India's people.

3. *Sin*

No one can read the verses of the Svāmī without feeling that he set a very high moral standard for himself and his followers. The question here is not that of his *ethical* standard, which will be discussed in the next section, but concerns his attitude toward sin as a phase of the spiritual life and its relationship to God. As a bhakta Rāmdās often referred to his sinfulness, and asked for the help of Śrī Rāma. He was conscious of his own spiritual needs and of his longing for Rāma's forgiveness, just as Tukārām prayed for forgiveness from Viṭhobā. In this sense, he doubtless thought of sin in its spiritual aspects, such as selfish and unworthy motives in the heart, leading one to do things displeasing to God. Unfortunately, the Svāmī gave an additional interpretation of sin when he referred to it as a part of the *karma* process, in which each evil act required subsequent expiation, a continuous cycle that went on indefinitely. This conception removed sin further away from God, making it part of a system that was both legalistic and pessimistic. It is a conception which goes

along with the doctrine of Brahman, the Supreme Being who is above description, and who therefore cannot be described by the adjective 'righteous.' Since Rāmdās did not centre his thought of righteousness in the Supreme Being, it is not surprising that so much of his thought concerning sin was of an external character, the elimination of which was achieved by ceremonial means, such as bathing, the repetition of the mantra and various forms of penance.

For Jesus, God the loving Father was a righteous God, all-holy and all-pure. Jesus believed that God's consuming desire was that all men should be good, noble and true; and in order to achieve that worthy end, God allowed each of His human children to be a free agent, able to choose between right and wrong. Sad to relate, some people, because of weakness or other causes, make wrong choices instead of right ones and fall into evil practices. Sinful thoughts and deeds discolour such lives and act as a barrier between them and God; since there can be no loving sympathetic communion between the God of righteousness and those who seek evil or who are indifferent to the good. Only by turning penitently away from that evil can the spiritual communion be resumed. Jesus thought of sin as that condition of the human heart which made joyous fellowship with God impossible. To Him, the world was a moral world and redemption from sin was a moral process. It will thus be seen that His teaching resembled the Svāmī's bhakti doctrine in a number of ways.

We must not fail to note, however, certain fundamental differences. Jesus revealed to mankind the awful character of sin, His sensitive soul shrinking from every contact with it; and when, after three years of ministry, He became engulfed in the evil passions stirred up by His persecutors, He did not hesitate to make the supreme sacrifice, in order that all men might know of God's loving forgiveness. In none of his ideas concerning sin did Rāmdās reveal such an abhorrence of it as Jesus did. In his Vedānta doctrine he made sin a part of a mechanical system, impersonal and surcharged with pessimism, redemption being release from the cycle of rebirths rather than from personal sin itself.

When contrasted with the radiant hope given by Jesus to all those held in the grip of unworthy desires, and the promise of God's triumphant spiritual power for everyone who seeks His help, the teaching of the Svāmī must seem vague indeed, and unable to satisfy the spiritual yearning of Indian hearts to-day. They are turning to Him who said, 'Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.'¹

4. *Incarnation*

The Svāmī's attitude toward incarnation may be gleaned from his statement that there are four kinds of deities, namely, idols, incarnations, God in the human soul, and the supreme spirit.² The typical Hindu word for incarnation is *avatāra*, which means a descent. There is every reason to believe that Rāmdās held the orthodox Hindu viewpoint of his day concerning incarnations, which was that in times of special need God descends to the earth in some form or disguise in order to accomplish a special task. Rāmdās himself was a follower of Śrī Rāma, who was an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu; but he also accepted the validity of other incarnations both great and small. He has stated in more than one reference that there have been both partial and full incarnations, and it is probable that he accepted the traditional views of Vaishṇavism, namely, that Viṣṇu has descended nine times and is due to make one more descent. These successive incarnations did not imply that Viṣṇu actually appeared upon the earth, but rather that he *seemed* to become man, just as an actor pretends to be someone else. It was more like the playing of a dramatic rôle than the personification of the god himself.³ There is every indication that Rāmdās regarded himself as an ordinary human being; but his biographers have put forth more ambitious claims, and by his orthodox followers he has generally been regarded as an incarnation of Māruti.

¹ Matthew vii : 7, 8.

² *Dāsbodh*, ch. xi, sec. 2.

³ *The Crown of Hinduism*, J. N. Farquhar, p. 431.

Rāmdās himself was conscious of his own spiritual needs, and prayed earnestly to Rāma for help in meeting the temptations of daily life. 'O thou who art the storehouse of all goodness, I have sinned night and day against thee. O thou who art beyond description by the serpent and the *Vedas*, and yet dost dwell upon the earth, come and reveal thyself to Rāmdās !'¹

One day Jesus said to His disciples, 'Who do men say that I am?' They said, 'Some say John the Baptist; some Elijah; and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He saith unto them, 'But who say ye that I am?' And Simon Peter answered and said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!'² This passage gives a helpful clue to the teaching of Jesus about incarnation. Jesus was conscious of His unique relationship to God. He felt that God had called Him to make a special revelation to mankind which would be for all time; and accordingly He announced to his disciples that He was the long-looked-for Messiah. To verify this claim Christ presented to the world a life of singular moral beauty and a self-consciousness which was entirely devoid of any sense of sin. Nay, more; He claimed authority upon earth to forgive sins in the name of the Father, and as He went about preaching and healing, He forgave the sins of the penitent. During the past 1,900 years, in spite of scholarly efforts to refute the claims of Jesus, the Christian Church has found His divine mission valid and has accepted Him as the one, true, final revelation of God, echoing the words of Peter on that eventful day in Palestine, 'Thou art the Christ!'

Therefore, it will readily be seen that aside from the basic principle, the teaching of Rāmdās concerning incarnation has little in common with that of Jesus. Jesus asserted that He Himself was the unique revelation of God in human life; whereas Rāmdās accepted a number of avatāras, including animals as well as men. The life of Jesus has been thoroughly verified by historical investigation, whereas many of the avatāras accepted by Rāmdās had their origin in mythology or else were historical

¹ *Karuṇāśhṭake*, Dhulia Edition, No. 147. ² Matthew, xvi : 13-18

persons who were deified by later generations. The self-consciousness of Jesus has been analysed by critical scholars who have been satisfied that although His spiritual experience was unique, it was none the less genuine; whereas Rāmdās openly confessed his weakness and asked God's forgiveness. With Rāmdās, 'incarnation' was more or less incidental; whereas it became the foundation stone of the new Christian religion; for the assurance of the disciples concerning the fact that Jesus had conquered death was what sent them forth as courageous messengers of the new faith. Their Master had not suffered ignominious defeat upon the Cross. After He had willingly made the last supreme sacrifice, death had failed to hold Him, and His Spirit became a present and victorious reality for all His followers. Why was it that the early disciples found it possible to believe in the teaching of Jesus? Was it not because their experience of His spiritual presence was set against the background of His incomparable earthly life, a life of such spiritual beauty and sinlessness that it could only be explained on the basis of its divinity? Hence they came to feel that it was entirely fitting for Jesus to assume for Himself the central place in God's scheme of redemption. 'God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.'¹ 'I came,' said Jesus, 'that they may have life and may have it abundantly.'² A leader like Mr. Gāndhi has helped to focus the thought of India upon the character of Jesus by his own Christlike qualities, and many other Indian seekers to-day are gazing at the sweet and loving countenance of the Christ of the Indian Road, who beckons them on to the abundant life.

(B) ETHICAL

Few Hindu religious movements have set a higher ethical standard than that of the Rāmdāsīs, and all those who have come into personal contact with earnest followers

¹ John iii : 16.

² John x : 10.

of the Svāmī testify to their high moral character. This thought we sought to bring out in Chapter vi, where various references were quoted illustrating the Svāmī's insistence on purity, unselfishness, truthfulness, sympathy, patience, humility, the forgiving spirit, faithfulness to duties and the spirit of happiness. Rāmdās himself set the example to his followers and, according to his biographers, he possessed a noble character.

The keynote of Christ's ethical teaching is found in the Sermon on the Mount (St. Matthew, Chapters v to vii), and here we discover a truly remarkable series of ethical requirements. Like Rāmdās, Jesus spoke of purity, unselfishness, truthfulness, sympathy, patience, humility, the forgiving spirit and other motives in the heart. Like Rāmdās, Jesus was referring to traits which He personified in His own life. The most notable feature of Christ's ethical teaching from the Christian standpoint, perhaps, is the decided advance it represents over the current Jewish ethical standards of His day. He lifted ethics out of the ceremonial sphere and made them a matter of the spirit within. 'Ye have heard that it was said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery"; but I say unto you, that every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery already with her in his heart.'¹ Jesus was not satisfied with commendable conduct, or even the spoken word, but insisted that the innermost motive must be right. Nay, more; He gave a deeper meaning to many of the familiar terms. Self-sacrifice became reflected in His own life of utter selflessness. The forgiving spirit receives its benediction from His words upon the Cross, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'²

What are the chief distinctions between the ethical teaching of Rāmdās and that of Jesus? After paying a warm tribute to the lofty ethics of the Svāmī, it is nevertheless clear to the student that the teaching of Jesus reaches a depth that Rāmdās knew not of. It is not merely that many of the Svāmī's precepts are tinged with intellectualism, but also that they lack the *content* of meaning which

¹ Matthew v : 27-28.

² Luke xxiii : 34.

Jesus gives to them.¹ Although the Svāmī's prosperous circumstances at the end of his life were doubtless the result of the adulation with which he was surrounded and not something he had personally coveted, yet he never reached the depths of self-abnegation that Jesus did when He gave up His life upon the Cross. Another point of contrast is that Jesus confined Himself to great spiritual principles, saying little about unimportant details. The Svāmī, on the other hand, gave his attention to both vital principles and trivial details, mixing them up to such a degree that one wonders whether he adequately discriminated between them. Lastly, there is the fundamental distinction regarding source and dynamic. To Rāmdās, noble character was a prize to be won by dint of hard and continuous moral effort, in which the assistance of Śrī Rāma was a factor, but which was also dependent upon the spiritual teacher (guru) and upon other factors. Jesus, however, centred His ethical teaching in the moral character of God, who was therefore the source of all ethical inspiration, and the objective of those who sought to grow in the beauty of character. Just as God was the source, so also did He furnish the dynamic by which earnest believers might hope to achieve character growth. Paul expresses this thought when he says, 'It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me'; and, in saying this, Paul is testifying to the secret of his own spiritual growth.² As Mr. Edwards says, 'India's cardinal religious defect is clearly her lack of a moral dynamic,' a lack which is all but fatal, because it leaves bewildered humanity to climb the spiritual ascent of life alone and unaided,—a task that is well-nigh hopeless.³ Jesus offers all His followers the inexhaustible spiritual resources of His Heavenly Father, which made spiritual victory certain to His immediate disciples, and assures spiritual victory for all those who love Him to-day.

¹ *Indian Theism*, N. Macnicol, p. 249.

² Galatians ii : 20.

³ Edwards, p. 259.

(C) GENERAL

1. *The Social Structure*

As has been stated in a previous chapter, Rāmdās, like most of the other Hindu religious teachers of his time, was not a social reformer. He accepted the Hindu social system as he found it. He was not a slave to it, however, and when occasion seemed justified, he did not hesitate to break the ordinary caste rules, and to associate with those of other castes, a number of whom became members of his movement. In common with other orthodox teachers, he put the Brahman caste at the head, because he sincerely felt that the spiritual leadership of the Hindu community was of paramount importance. He gave women a more honourable share in his movement than would have been allowed in a strictly orthodox group; but there is no indication that he held radical religious views in regard to them. While the Svāmī was friendly with low castes, he did not make a definite place for them in his movement; and the low-caste element has never held the place of honour among Rāmdāsīs that it has at Paṇḍharpūr. It is not surprising that Rāmdās accepted these various grades in the Hindu social structure, when one realizes that his outlook on life was chiefly built on the doctrines of *transmigration* and *karma*; and under these circumstances it was perhaps natural that low-castes should be of lesser importance in his eyes. In other words, his social idealism was linked up with his scheme of redemption; and since human personality was such a transitory factor, according to the doctrine of Śaṅkara, those individuals nearest to salvation were of more spiritual significance than those further away.

Jesus built His social structure upon the basis of the eternal worth of every human being in the sight of God. Regardless of colour, race, wealth, culture or any other distinction, Jesus taught that all men were equal in His Father's estimation and were of infinite value both in this world and the next. When this truth finally dawned upon the intelligence of the early disciples, they formed a Christian brotherhood of the most democratic type, even holding their property in common and pooling their resour-

ces, each one disclaiming individual ownership. As in the case of the Svāmī, so also with Jesus, there were women who ministered to His physical needs; but with this distinction, that Jesus regarded them as of equal spiritual value with the men. For Jesus, all human beings were equally precious in the Father's sight—both rich and poor, young and old, male and female, Jew and Gentile. Jesus went so far as to say that one human soul was worth more in the divine plan than the whole physical universe. 'For what shall a man be profited if he shall gain the whole world and forfeit his life?'¹

Here we have a chasm that cannot be bridged except by a leap. Between the doctrine of the extinction of personality as taught by the Svāmī, and the teaching of Jesus on the eternal qualities of the human soul, there is so wide a gap that one is baffled indeed to find a harmonious contact. The so-called 'problem of untouchability' may have arisen because of the advisability of certain groups performing particular tasks in the community, and because of the consequent belief that the path of salvation was closed to those who performed the menial services. Whatever the cause may have been, a large part of the Hindu community became gradually excommunicated from the community temples and wells, with the result that Hindu religious leaders to-day are facing a most vexatious social problem. Its importance may be gauged by the fact that when Mahātmā Gāndhī recently emerged from his years of silence, one of his first utterances was, 'My conviction is confirmed that without the removal of untouchability, the spread of *khaddar*, and Hindu-Muslim unity, *swarāj* is impossible.'² So-called Christian nations are still far from fulfilling the spirit of the teaching of Jesus in their social organization; witness the presence of race-prejudice and of invidious social distinctions. These conditions are due, however, to the *failure* of such communities to rise to the heights of Christ's principles of brotherly love and the supreme value of every human soul. In removing the curse of untouchability and other crying social evils which

¹ Matthew xvi : 26.

² *Dnyanodaya*, Jan. 6, 1927, p. 2

are paralyzing India's political evolution and social progress, the leaders of India's social and political life are spontaneously turning to Him who said, 'For one is your teacher and all ye are brethren. . . . Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled, and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted.'¹

2. *Life in This World*

As has been frequently stated, the Vedānta teaching was a dominant note in the Svāmī's message, and according to this doctrine the world is not real but only *appears* to be so. It is the scene of that depressing process of retribution known as *transmigration* and *karma*. Hence Rāmdās felt that the world was essentially evil as well as illusory; and in his classic story of a man's life, found in the third chapter of the *Dāśbodh*, he clearly shows the successive tragedies which make life something to be shunned rather than as something to be enjoyed. Even as a bhakta, the Svāmī dwelt on his spiritual unworthiness, and his yearning to escape. Under the influence of Śivāji's successes, he came to feel that there were certain social and practical duties which everyone ought to perform, and to this extent during his later years he regarded the world with tolerant eyes. He developed a doctrine of happiness which was somewhat unique. As regards his cosmogony, which is described in Chapter v, it need only be stated here that it was built around the Sāṃkhya theories, with certain additions, and that it was very explicit, giving even the numbers involved in various steps of creation.

One of the criticisms directed against Jesus was that He was too friendly in his social relationships, the Pharisees being particularly incensed because He ate with doubtful social characters. Jesus taught that man needs to adjust himself to the world, rather than to separate himself from it. One of His most frequent sayings was, 'Be of good cheer!' His parable of the Good Samaritan was a call to genuine neighbourliness. He accepted the reality of the material universe, but made it subordinate, in His

¹ Matthew xxiii : 8, 12

scheme of values, to the spiritual life of man. Because Nature was a revelation of God's goodness, it was beautiful in itself; changeable, yet possessing permanence. While a normal life brought its successive sorrows, the element of happiness should outweigh that of sadness; and this teaching of Jesus is definitely confirmed by the joyousness of the early Christians as they met together and sang hymns. Although they felt what is called the 'apocalyptic urge,' which transported their thoughts to the future, they did not shun the normal experiences of life and rejoiced in every friendly contact or opportunity for service.

In this attitude toward daily life, therefore, the teaching of Jesus is notably different from that of Rāmdās. To Jesus, the world was real and not illusory; it was an opportunity for happy service, and not a series of misfortunes. In stressing this distinction, the writer is unable to agree with Prof. Radhakrishnan, who speaks of the ephemeral quality of the material world as a substantiation of the *māyā* doctrine. While modern science readily admits that matter is constantly changing, it also asserts that it is indestructible, and that while energy may be transformed, it continues to express itself in one way or another.¹ Jesus generally contented Himself with enunciating abiding principles, rather than the specific application of those principles to local situations. He had little to say about the method of creation, but as a growing boy He had studied assiduously the Old Testament scriptures, and had later announced Himself as the One who came to fulfil the aspirations of the scriptures. We can confidently conclude, therefore, that Jesus believed the universe had been created by His Father, as the ancient Jewish scriptures had set forth. There is nothing in His teaching which makes it inconsistent for Christians to-day to accept the valid facts of modern science. The Svāmī's cosmogony, on the other hand, is archaic and hopelessly out-of-date for those who view the universe through the intelligent interpretation of modern knowledge. It was a cosmogony belonging to the realm of mythology rather than that of

¹ *The Indian Social Reformer*, Nov. 20, 1926, p. 181

rational observation. Those who love the beautiful nature-poems of Rabindranath Tagore, or who take pride in the rapid development of India's economic resources, will assuredly find little satisfaction in the view of the world that was vouchsafed to this Hindu saint.

3. *Conclusion*

What, then, should be said in conclusion? The writer earnestly hopes that no one will misunderstand his attitude after reading the present chapter. He has been greatly inspired by his study of this Indian saint of the seventeenth century, who performed such a unique spiritual task in his day of need and did it so acceptably. India may well feel proud of her saints and poets, who have revealed to their fellow-countrymen the primacy of the spiritual life. But, from the very nature of the case, the message of the Svāmī was limited by his geographical outlook and his contemporary cultural background. A great deal that he taught has ceased to have spiritual value for India's people. The message of Jesus, on the other hand, derives part of its uniqueness from its timelessness and universality, for it is as applicable to the twentieth century as it was to the first, to the West as well as to the East. Knowledge has advanced, the universe has expanded, and mankind has developed; but it is just as true to-day as it was 1,900 years ago that Jesus teaches us how to live; to live the abundant life, which He lived Himself and which He helps us to live. And, in conclusion, the writer would express the hope that students of Rāmdās, after reading the present chapter, may feel impelled to consult the four Gospels at their leisure, and there verify this brief and inadequate interpretation of the message of Jesus.

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